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L E T T E R, &c.

GENTLEMEN,

A FEW months ago, I had access to see a Performance, entitled, *The Re-exhibition of the Testimony, &c.*; of the revival and publication of which, the world is told, ye were the instruments. There are various religious articles in that work, about which I find myself obliged to differ from you in judgment; but, as it does not coincide with the design of this epistle to discuss each of these, I am not to be understood to deliver my opinion, at present, upon all the objectable branches of the work. My attention is directed chiefly to that part in the Appendix, which affects the Reformed Presbytry; that ecclesiastical court, in this country, of which I have the honour of being a member.—The simple mention of my connexion with the Reformed Presbytry, and your peculiar concern in the Re-exhibition, are all the apology necessary for putting into your hands this epistle.

On the first reading of the Appendix, I conceived the thought of offering, in public, some Remarks upon it. It was inconvenient for me, at that time, to carry this into execution; the share of a work of superior importance, having been devolved upon me: But, still minded to attempt something of the kind, I charged myself to embrace the earliest opportunity for that purpose. It was not, however, till a dispensation of providence confined me to my room, from the public duties of my function, that an opportunity offered, which I have improved to this end. And now, as the result of the whole, have transmitted to you the few following thoughts, relative to that subject, through the channel of a public letter.

Gentlemen, what you offer against the Reformed Presbytry, I find to be contained in pages 175, 6, 7. of the Re-exhibition. The whole of what you have offered there, is to their prejudice: not one favourable expression hath dropped from your pen concerning them. It seems, the Reformed Presbytry, with all in subjection to them, must stand in your book of rates, as a *bad Sett*, in which the least good is not found. After all, you have ventured to attack them on one quarter only, *viz.* the subject of Magistracy. The Reformed Presbytry, with that freedom which Christianity allows, have emitted to the world a full account of all their religious doctrines; and it is not unknown, that many of these are in full opposition to the sentiments of Seceders. I may mention their doctrine about the constitution of the revolution church;—the bond of the Secession for renewing our national covenants, &c.—Some people have thought it strange, that the Committee should have confined their opposition against the Reformed Presbytry, to the article of Magistracy, as divine truth is interested in the other points of difference, no less than in this. Since your Committee have been pleased to let the world hear what they had to say against the Reformed Presbytry, on the litigated article of magistracy; I may hint to you, it would be acceptable to many, to know what you have to offer against them, on the above-mentioned, or on any other articles of difference: for my own part, I shall wait for it.

The subject on which you attack the Reformed Presbytry, is great and important: God's ordinance of civil magistracy. Before I approach to the Committee's observations on that head, I beg leave to detain you with a preliminary, and its consequences. Permit me to say, it is impossible for a reader unacquainted with the doctrine of your and our church, upon the subject, to derive the least information of the true state of the controversy, or, of the genuine sentiments of the Re-

formed Presbytry, by all that the Committee have said. From the manner in which your opposition is laid, indeed, an ignorant reader can hardly escape forming a wrong opinion of the doctrine of the Presbytery. The natural idea which arises in the mind, on reading the whole of your passage, is this, That the Reformed Presbytry hold it as an established principle, that the ordinance of civil magistracy is finally abolished in the days of the gospel; or, that the professors of Christianity are freed from moral obligation to civil authority. This is the very idea which arises in the mind, from the manner in which the Committee have been pleased to treat the Presbytry; than which, nothing is more remote from the truth.

A standing Testimony, (as yours seems intended,) for the present and succeeding generations, ought to have exhibited a just representation of every principle it meant to reprobate. Before you had condemned the Reformed Presbytry in the ears of the world, it was incumbent on you to have stated clearly the matter in debate; to have told what principle you meant to oppose; after which, you were fairly entitled to the liberty of disputation on the subject.—This logicians and all honest reasoners do: and had it been the object of the Committee to have informed the reader, in order to his conviction, this, I am positive, you would have done also. But, perhaps, in the judgment of your Committee, conviction may be reached without information: a new invention, indeed, of ecclesiastical reviewers! All the honour of it undiminished, shall be ascribed to them.

Whatever the Committee may pretend as an excuse for this capital omission, contrary to the maxims of sound reasoning, and injurious to the Reformed Presbytry, justice and candor will not be soon satisfied in matters of such importance. And, Gentlemen, allow me to say, a representation of the Presbytry's principles on the head of civil government, was by no means

superfeded from the knowledge many of your people possess of them. Defects must be supplied by some : for once, I shall undertake the task, and inform the reader what the doctrine of the Reformed Presbytry upon magistracy is.—Let the following complex proposition express it.

The Reformed Presbytry maintain, That civil magistracy is an ordinance of God, appointed for the purposes of his own glory, the good of mankind, and the external defence of the church, originally founded in the moral law, the law of nature, now put into the hands of the Mediator, as head of all things, for the sake of the church, clearly revealed to sinners in the sacred oracles of inspiration ; that the people, in whom the radical power of vesting magistrates is, when blessed with divine revelation, are sacredly bound to observe the laws, regulations, and statutes of divine revelation, both in the formation of their constitutions, and in the investiture of their magistrates, supreme and subordinate ; that the persons to be vested with the magistracy, in Christian lands, who, by their office do become God's moral vicegerents, ought to be professors of the true religion ; that these attainments in civil reformation, to which different lands have reached, ought to be steadily adhered to in the erection of magistrates ; and, that a magistracy thus formed, is entitled to subjection, as to God's ordinance, from every soul within the territory, for conscience sake : But if, in opposition to this, a people blessed with divine revelation, and with reformations in magistracy, according to the holy scriptures, shall be wicked enough to violate the laws of divine revelation, and to overturn all their former reformations in magistracy, in the new-modelling of their civil constitutions, and in the investiture of their magistrates ; and if they shall devise great and gross corruptions of the true religion, tending towards the subversion thereof, adopt these into their constitution, and make them the foundation of power, and a bond of union in the civil state, the Reformed Pres-

bytry are humbly of opinion, that, in such a case, the magistracy thus erected, ought to be publicly testified against; and that it has but little claim to subjection from the faithful, for conscience sake.

The above, I think, is the true doctrine of the Presbytry; the bare rehearsal of which, in a Christian ear, one is ready to apprehend, would carry along with it irresistible conviction upon the mind. Seceders themselves, though the advocates of another doctrine, under the commanding influence of truth, have acknowledged *materially* the truth of the Presbytry's doctrine in some of their writings. Notwithstanding, in the keen defence of the received doctrine of their own church, they have avowedly maintained, before God, and the world, that the deed of the body politic, in erecting constitutions, although upon terms diametrically opposite to the plain precepts of divine revelation, and in vesting the open enemies of Christianity with the magistratical power, upon the footing of these constitutions, even within a Christian reformed land, is the ordinance of God, and entitled to subjection and obedience from a Christian people, for conscience sake*. Let us be ashamed, that such doctrine ever dropped from the conversation, pulpits, pens, and courts of Presbyterians, within these Christian reformed lands! While Seceders and the Reformed Presbytry agree, that the right of election belongs to the people, who are to be governed, they dis-

* The Committee refer the reader to the Associate Presbytery's answers to Mr. Nairn's Reasons of Dissent; as a proof of their political doctrine. In p. 70, the reader will find the following sentiment.—*Wherever they voluntarily constitute, or consent unto any form of civil government, under the rule of any particular persons, whatever sin be in the circumstances of this their deed, with respect to the government or governors which they constitute, or consent unto; yet the deed itself, or the substance of the deed, is always in consequence of, and agreeable to God's law; wherefore, their governors, as such, and in the substance of the matter, are ordained of God, according to that law; and this is that divine ordination which the apostle ascribes to all magistrates, as such; and, particularly, unto these of his day in the Roman empire.*

agree in the above particular. As Seceders affirm, that the voice of the majority, in a Christian land, confers a validity upon their deed in vesting magistrates, though on terms clearly and materially repugnant to scripture; and the Reformed Presbytry affirm, that the voice of the majority, in a Christian land, can confer no validity upon their deed, when repugnant to the great laws of scripture.—By this it is not meant, that every lesser evil, or every circumstantial failure, which may take place in the erection of magistracy amongst Christians, shall invalidate the deed, so as to render the substance of the action, (otherwise good,) null and void, and of no moral and divine obligation upon the conscience: for, alas! we imperfect mortals do frequently, if not always, intermingle sin with our very best performances; and, perhaps, there are but few, if any performances, of an extensive and complicated nature, in which mankind adhere punctually to the letter of the law in all its parts. Is it any wonder then, if some lesser evils, or some circumstantial failures shall be found in the erection of magistracy, even amongst Christians, about which so many sinful imperfect creatures are concerned, and which may have to conflict with difficulties, great and numerous? But the case is vastly different, and it is certainly meant in the Presbytry's doctrine, when substantial evils, affecting the essence, and belonging to the matter of the deed, so as to characterize the nature and genius of the magistracy, are found in the choice of the people.—For example, when the choice of a majority fixes a constitution, the genius of which is diametrically opposite to the scriptures of truth; and, it may be, to the received and established religion of the country, in the preceeding period: or, when the choice of a majority lodges the whole civil power, in the hands of the open enemies of Christianity, and the avowed patrons of Antichristianism. Both these cases are repugnant to the great and staminal laws of scripture. Those two contradictory opinions, form a wide differ-

ence in testimony-bearing betwixt them; and here the controversy principally rests.

The sentiment of the Presbytry I espouse, and think myself supported by the infallible Judge of all controversies, God himself speaking in holy scripture, Hosea viii. 4. *They have set up kings, but not by me: they have made princes, and I knew it not.* This text, far from allowing a validity in the deeds of a majority, when repugnant to the great laws of scripture, establishes the doctrine of the Presbytry, by refusing to acknowledge those idolatrous wicked magistrates, whom the apostate Israelites had placed in power over them, against the laws directing and binding their choice. I have frequently wondered, how Seceders were able to satisfy *their own minds*, about the meaning of this text, so plainly opposite to their received principles. The disagreeable consequences with which the doctrine of the Secession is replete, confirm me in the belief of the Presbytry's sentiment. Some of those it is easy to mention.—Their doctrine bestows upon the voice of the people, a power of negating the will of the supreme Jehovah; for, whatever he has commanded in his word, and stamped with his sacred authority, relative to magistracy, ceases to bind, when the voice of a perverse majority carries the deed against it.—It exalts the voice of a majority to the rank of infallibility, and places it upon the same chair with that vile creature, who sits in the temple of God. Papists suppose their Pope never can err: the Secession argue, as if the voice of the people were *always* right.—It entirely sets aside the necessity of all laws, divine and human, about the genius and conditions of the magistracy, and the qualifications of magistrates; for the doctrine implies that the voice of a majority, simply of itself, and alone, settles the point. —It destroys all fundamental good laws of state; for none of these, although deriving an inviolable obligation from the moral law, and apparently conducive to the interests of the people, especially in reli-

gious matters, can bind longer than the capricious vote of a majority carries an alteration of them: thus, it supposes the people to be possessed of a moral power, at the end of each moment, to vary their constitutions, as humour, passion, corruption, or novelty may direct: hence an end to constitutional securities, original charters, &c. Far from being forced, these are the natural consequences of allowing a validity to the voice of a majority, when clearly and materially repugnant to sacred scripture.

The method of the Secession, in arguing from the case of heathens, that body of sinners, who are without the light of divine revelation, to the case of Christians, illuminated by divine revelation, in order to support their doctrine, is both singular and fallacious. No just argument can be taken from the one and applied to the other, for this obvious reason, that the two cases are not parallel. The superior advantage of divine revelation, enjoyed by the Christian world, above the world of heathens, forms an essential difference betwixt the two. The Israelites were separated from all nations, to receive a divine system of laws, religious and civil, in opposition to the corrupt forms of the world around them; and disregarding these, they were obliged to accept the laws given to them by God. Since the end of their separation, under the conduct of divine providence, from the nations around them, and left in darkness, was, that they might receive, observe, and keep pure and entire, the ordinances of Jehovah, delivered to them, would it not be perverse reasoning to maintain, that there was no essential difference, in point of obligation, betwixt them and heathens? Is it any more just reasoning to maintain a plea, for the justification of the validity of deeds among Christians, from what takes place in Heathenish countries, from which the Christian world is separated, by the wonderful providence and grace of almighty God, to the enjoyment of his holy word as their all-governing law? To argue

from the one to the other, is both untheological, and illogical. I am no enemy to civil government amongst Heathens: however, it would seem to me, that Heathens, being ignorant of the extent of the moral law, cannot erect a magistracy, complexly taken, which corresponds to God's ordinance, revealed in sacred scripture. A Heathenish magistracy, it is possible, may be as complete as the light of a Heathenish conscience serves to dictate: but it can be no better. Heathens, by the assistance of the imperfect scraps of the moral law on their minds, may perform many actions good in themselves; which, in so far as they are good, ought not to be condemned, because they are the actions of Heathens. In agreeableness to this maxim, the deed of Heathens, in erecting a magistracy amongst them, must not be condemned, because done by Heathens. Nevertheless, Heathens being ignorant in a great measure of the true God and his moral law, in all its branches, and not enlightened by divine revelation, are incapable to form a proper magistracy, conformable to the extent of the moral law, adequate to all the purposes of magistracy among Christians, and serving as a civil guard around the church, truths, and ordinances of Christ; and if so, a Heathenish magistracy, or a magistracy of the same complexion with that which obtains amongst Heathens, or amongst those nations that are the gross corrupters of Christianity, must be odious in a Christian reformed land; and none but Christians, professing the true religion, not heathens, idolators, gross hereticks, immoral persons, &c. can be lawful rulers in such a land, or properly discharge the great duties belonging to their office, and incumbent on them.—In confirmation of which, I offer to you the following reasons.

1. The magistrate, in his official character, is God's moral vicegerent, under him, and over men; though elected by the people, he must not be viewed as *the mere creature* of the state. The office he fills, being of divine ordination, he becomes by, and in virtue of his office,

the VICEGERENT of God, his MORAL DEPUTY, and a visible JUDGE for him on earth; on which account, magistrates are stiled in scripture *gods*: Psal. lxxxii. 6. *I have said, Ye are gods; and all of you are children of the Most High.*—The ministers of God; Rom. xiii. 4. *He is the minister of God to thee for good.*—And their judgment is called God's judgment, Deut. i. 17. *The judgment is God's.* To the right and proper existence of this character, it is requisite that magistrates do know, and profess the true God; they must be able to adopt the apostles creed, 1 Cor. viii. 5, 6. *For although there be that are called gods, whether in heaven or in earth, (as there be gods many and lords many;) but to us there is but one God, the Father, of whom are all things.* But how can they acquire this creed without the belief of the scriptures, which alone do point out to us lapsed sinners, that in the Godhead there are three persons; and that Jesus, who is the Redeemer of sinners, is one of those glorious persons? The confused deistical notion of a supreme power ruling in nature, will not answer this end. To the right and proper existence of this character, it is also requisite that magistrates be sober in deportment, and that they exhibit in their own practice, before the people, God's *moral image*. It is utterly inconsistent with the character, that magistrates be found profane wretches, or abandoned sinners, who have cast off all fear of God in life. Such persons have been, indeed, the over-ruled instruments of providence for some good actions to the church; but they are oftener his hand to punish a sinful people, and a means to try the faith and patience of the saints. To elude the force of this, Seceders have had recourse to an odd device, while they institute a comparison betwixt mechanics and tradesmen, and magistrates; and would have the world to believe, that religion is not more necessary to the character of the one, than it is to that of the other: But no mechanic, no tradesman, in his mechanical and trading character, is God's moral vicege-

rent ; whereas, by the united suffrage of both scripture and reason, the magistrate, in his magistratical character, is God's moral vicegerent : hence it is easy to understand why religion is required to the character of magistrates, and not to that of tradesmen. It is a device equally odd, to institute a comparison betwixt parents and children, and magistrates and subjects, with a view to shew that religion is not more necessary to the relation of magistrates, than it is to that of parents and children. Divine providence hath not allowed to parents a freedom of choice, in the quality of their children, neither have children a freedom of choice in the quality of their parents : but it hath pleased a holy God to bestow upon the people the privilege of a choice in their magistrates ; and it is most certain, where-ever a freedom of choice is granted, mankind are sacredly bound to exercise it, according to the law directing and binding to fill up the relation.

2. It is a capital branch of the magistrates office, in jurisdiction, to decide those differences which may arise amongst men : HE, for this purpose, is a visible judge for God on earth ; and in the doing of this, it may be necessary to administer oaths. Every oath ought to be administered in the sacred name of Jehovah ; and according to that external form which is of divine institution, in the sacred scriptures : to qualify magistrates for this, a competent knowledge of the true God, and of the form of this ordinance, as revealed in sacred scriptures, appears necessary ; nay, a becoming sober bridled conversation is also highly requisite. What person, in calm reason, will plead the right of a habitual profane swearer, and open blasphemer, to administer oaths in Jehovah's name to Christians ?—Moreover, it is the duty of the magistrate, in virtue of the office he fills, to explain the nature of an oath, to those who are called before him to make oath, understanding them to be ignorant of it, after which, the jurant swearing wrong, it must be at his own peril : all which requires the ma-

gistrate to be acquainted with, to confess the sacred scriptures before men, and to demean himself suitably thereto. To this purpose let us hear the words of inspiration, Job xxxiv. 18. *Is it fit to say to a king, Thou art wicked? and to princes, Ye are ungodly?*—In opposition to this it may be urged, That religion is equally necessary in the jurant who is to make oath, as in the magistrate who is to tender the oath; I answer, unless the party making oath does possess a competent knowledge of the nature of an oath, his swearing cannot serve the smallest purpose for which an oath is appointed: *An oath for confirmation is an end of all strife.* But what confirmation can the verbal repetition of the words of an oath, by one wholly ignorant of its meaning, give to any matter in controversy? It can give little more than the same words repeated by an idiot can do.—Again, divine providence is the only index pointing out witnesses, in the case of controversy, and in attesting facts. The magistrate is shut up, by dire necessity, to admit such as providence presents, and he must make the best use of these he can; but divine providence hath not so limited a Christian people, they are blessed with a divine law, which directs and binds them to *chuse* out from among themselves persons qualified for that important office.—Again, a stated administrator, well qualified, is of vast assistance to occasional swearers: besides, the station of a constant administrator differs exceedingly from the situation of an occasional jurant. I hope, I may now subjoin, that heathens, those who hold opinions inconsistent with Deity, habitual profane swearers, open blasphemers, &c. are persons by no means qualified to fill the place of legal stated administrators of oaths, among a Christian people. The instances of Abimelech's swearing to Abraham, and Zedekiah's swearing to the king of Babylon, will not invalidate the doctrine. Abimelech and Abraham were two independent persons, not in the state of magistrate and subject; and it is presumable, that at the time of the oath, Abimelech

had acquired such knowledge of Abraham's God, through his acquaintance with Abraham, as to be able to swear by him, to all the external purposes of the oath; for, in positive terms, he required Abraham to swear by the true God, Gen. xxi. 23. *Now therefore swear unto me by God.* Zedekiah was a captive to the king of Babylon, and submitted to him by the force of conquering arms. The oath was an additional security to his promise of subjection to the foreign king, *as a conqueror*; and seems to have been given by Zedekiah, rather in the sense of a security to him, at his demand, than to have been made before him *as an administrator*.

3. It is an essential branch of the magistrates office, in Christian lands, besides his cognoscing the civil affairs of the country, to support the true religion, defend the true church of God, and to suppress the propagating of open idolatry, damnable heresies, blasphemies, &c. within his country; and this he is to perform, not merely as a man,—a man of extensive influence; but as a magistrate,—a Christian ruler: but all this can be performed by the professors of the true religion alone. The truth of which variously appears*.—Religious scriptural qualifications are required to *the being* of the magistrate's office, in Christian lands, Exod. xviii. 21. *Thou shalt provide out of all the people able men, such as fear God, men of truth, hating covetousness.* 2 Sam. xxiii. 3. *He that ruleth over men must be just, ruling in the fear of God.* The latitude of the expression deserves our notice, *over men*, not *over the Israelites only*.—The instances of religious magistrates, employ-

* But why need I prove this to the Burgher Committee? You are already well provided with ample proof of the doctrine, by a divine of your own church, the Rev. Mr. John Brown of Haddington, in a late publication against the toleration of Idolatry, &c. While his strictures point out the futility of our modern notions in favours of unlimited religious toleration; they effectually sap the very cause of the Secession, in one of its great parts, their loose doctrine of the magistrate's power about sacred things.

ing their power in behalf of the true religion, are recorded in scripture, for standing precedents, to future generations; and the instances of irreligious magistrates are left as beacons, to warn mankind, in all time coming.—It is promised, that magistrates *shall be nursing fathers to the church; that kings shall bring gifts to God's house at Jerusalem; that the mighty kings on earth shall do service to the Redeemer, &c.*—These, and similar promises afford ground to believe, that the Christian world will be favoured with such magistrates, as part of the glory of the latter day; when the thrones, crowns, and sceptres of princes shall be consecrated to Messiah, in the service of his interest, and church on earth: and they point out the evident duty of a Christian people, to seek after such.—Magistrates, in their official character, are commanded to serve Christ in the interest of his truth, and church on earth, Psalm ii. 11, 12. *O ye kings,—serve the Lord: Kiss the Son.*—Do not these things furnish ground for our belief, that religion connects with, and belongs to the magistratical function?

4. Magistrates, in virtue of their office, ought to be living examples of morality before the people of their jurisdiction. The moral law, on the principles of which their commanding and judging the people ought to proceed, should be exhibited in their personal deportment. The judges of the moral law ought to be keepers of the moral law. But is it possible to separate this from religion? The duties of the moral law, in both tables, are connected: no scheme sets them asunder; the deistical scheme of separating betwixt piety to God and benevolence to men (the fictitious idol of our modern moralists) excepted. How salutary the good example of rulers among the people! Alas! how pernicious the evil example of the judge who fears not God! *The wicked walk on every side, when the vilest men are exalted*, Psal. xii. 8.—For these, and other good reasons, I apprehend, the Reformed Presbytry are in the right, when they plead the necessity of scriptural constitutions,

and of scriptural qualifications in magistrates ruling over a Christian people; and, out of conscience to God's ordinance, refuse to acknowledge, as lawful scriptural constitutions, and magistrates, those that are void of such characters, which a people, inattentive to, or despising God's ordinance, according to his word, may set up amongst them.—I may now ask, What just ground is there for the Burgher ministers, to declaim with so much virulence, against the Reformed Presbytry from the pulpit, as it is said they do; and with the armour of misrepresentations, and warm invectives, to clothe their people against the power of sacred truth taught by the Presbytry on this article? And in particular, what good ground is there for the liberty your Committee have taken to treat them with so much obloquy, as you have been pleased to do in the Re-exhibition?

The Committee's animadversions upon the Presbytry, as found in the Appendix, now fall to be examined. These are few in number, and quickly dispatched. Whether this deserves to be reckoned an instance of improved policy in the Committee, or an act of mercy to the Presbytry, the Committee surely are the properest judges to determine.—It has been said, long elaborate harangues against the Presbytry, from the pulpit, are disgusting to many of the Burgher hearers: A notable confirmation of this, never to be forgotten by the Burgher preachers, is the event which fell out, last year, in the parish of Shots, when a preacher of that fraternity, upon the Lord's day, declaiming with great zeal against the Presbytry, became so displeasing to his audience, that some of the Burghers present, incapable to endure longer, rose, and offered public opposition to the preacher, in the time of his sermon. Perhaps, this instance has been an useful hint to study brevity on the same subject, in time coming.—If the hasty dispatch was intended as an act of mercy to the Presbytry, lest long dwelling on their evils should have proved too galling unto them, I lament that prudence was so great-

ly a-wanting, to conduct this amiable principle to its proper object: had mercy been under the conduct of prudence, the good of the Presbytry was more likely to have been reached. The recovery of the Presbytry from error, (supposing their principle to be such,) is the proper design of mercy; prudence would have conducted the Committee into the right way of reaching this, by a more full discussion of the subject, in the mode of just representation, and solid argument.

Gentlemen, believe me, I am in no passion, when I averr, That your observations are a cluster of mere assertions and suppositions, without reasoning, and without proof. Reasoning and proof are employed in some other parts of the work; but those precious stores appear to be wholly exhausted, for none of them are had when the combat is maintained against the Presbytry. The language of your observations is malicious. A few lines contain all that the Committee have offered, and in these the malicious epithet *Antigovernment* is applied no less than four times to the Reformed Presbytry, and to the people under their inspection. The Presbytry are wholly indebted to the Secession for this epithet. It is a sweet morsel rolled under their tongue: and, O how pleasantly do they feed upon it! With what warmth do they talk it over in company! With what vehemence do they breathe it from the pulpit! With what accentuation do they mark it in their books! The term Anti-government signifies those who deny the very being of government, and who are enemies to all government, divine and human: enemies to the moral government of God over the world, the government of his grace in the soul, the government of ministers in the church, and the government of magistrates in the state. It is a piece of gross slander to bestow this epithet upon the Presbytry. I know of none to whom the term can be applied, except to devils and impenitent sinners; and if you can drag the Presbytry in among them, then I confess the name will be applicable to them.—The

all-powerful reason, for which Seceders bestow this epithet so liberally upon the Presbytry, is, because the Presbytry differ from them, about the sacred mode of civil magistracy; and, stopping short of their length, refuse to own, as God's moral ordinance, agreeable to his holy word, what they are persuaded has no divine warrant there.

As the Presbytry acknowledge that civil magistracy is an ordinance of the supreme Jehovah, and wherever they find this erected amongst men, according to his word, they desire to revere it for conscience sake; so the ill-natured name cannot disquiet the conscious integrity of their hearts. But there is not, perhaps, an epithet better adapted to render those, upon whom it is bestowed, obnoxious to the general resentment of mankind, and to irritate reigning powers against them, than the very epithet *Anti-government*: and with this intention, I cannot restrain my mind from thinking, you, Gentlemen, have used it; and by the constant, but jejune repetition thereof, you hope to stain the character of your opponents. In this practice you react the infamous deeds of the old Informers in Scotland: but, to your severe mortification, I must let you know, that intelligent disinterested persons are incapable to be impressed by the invectives of a body of men, whom they understand the Reformed Presbytry have foiled in argument.—I submit it to the judicious public, whether the principle of the Secession, which makes the right of princes to the throne, to hinge *purely* upon the fluctuating voice of a majority; and which allows a majority, inclining to do so, a lawful power to degrade the prince, without any cause of offence given by him, and to exalt another to the same throne; or, the principle of the Presbytry, which pleads the necessity of proper qualifications in the prince, with a just constitution of government; and requires the subjects to yield a conscientious subjection to him, without allowing them a power, at pleasure, wantonly to pluck the prince

from his throne, and to exalt the basest of men unto it: I say, I submit to the public, whether the first, or the last of these principles, contains in it *most* of the Anti-government system.

If I may be allowed to anticipate the judgment of this great tribunal, I would give it in the affirmative as to the first. To make it plain, by one instance, I would say, Had the Pretender to the British throne, in his late unsuccessful attempt, in the year 1745, been so fortunate, as to have procured a majority of voices in the British dominions, in favours of his claim to that throne; then, according to the principle of the Secession, he would have become the only lawful prince, and the house of Hanover, with the reigning prince, must have been stripped of all right to that throne; and, if they had persisted in making claim to it, must have been viewed as daring pretenders, and base traitors. Or suppose any popular minority Gentleman, at present in the House of Commons, should acquire that degree of popularity amongst the majority of the different ranks in these lands, as to induce them to vote for him the throne, now occupied by George III. king of Great Britain, according to the principle of the Secession, this person would be the only lawful king in Great-Britain, and king George III. would be divested of all right to his throne, and Seceders themselves would be heard to join the salutation of the great body, *God save the new King*. All intelligent persons cannot miss to perceive *something* of an Anti-government nature in this principle. On what then does the stability of seceding loyalty to his present Majesty, nay, to the British constitution rest? It rests on the fluctuating voice of a majority.—To some it appears probable, this may be the hidden reason, why Seceders refused the lawfulness of those oaths to the present government, which the government itself has made *the capital, if not the only tessera* of legal loyalty.

It is no new practice in the Secession to exclaim against the old dissenters as Anti-government men, and

to pour forth against them a flood of calumny on that head: with great deliberation they can call them, *men of bloody principles, enemies to the present magistracy, rebels against the king, the foes of their own country, &c. &c. &c.* while the Presbytry frankly confess *their own* principles concerning the ordinance of magistracy, and the present constitution of Great-Britain, civil and ecclesiastic; they deny the truth, and laugh at the folly of all such charges. Their testimony, as lifted up against public evils and defections, is properly a testimony against the nations at large, for the heinous sins of setting aside the good reformation, and of taking into its place manifold corruptions, which being inlaid into the constitutions of these lands, are exercised in the administration; and against the different ranks, in particular, according to their respective connections with these evils. Their testimony is a testimony against the body politic, or all active in the change, for the sin of voting away, and expunging the good constitutions of our fathers, founded on the word of God; and for voting and introducing into their room the present prelatical and erastian constitutions; as also against all consenters to this deed, with those who stand neutral in the matter. Their testimony is a testimony against all subjects, for vesting and pleading the lawfulness of magistrates, supreme and subordinate, on such a footing; and against all magistrates, supreme and subordinate, for accepting and exercising their office, on such a footing. Their testimony is a testimony against all incorporating with bodies so formed; especially when the terms of admission are in themselves sinful.—Such is the matter of the Presbytry's testimony; in the management of which, the innocence and inoffensiveness of their lives have been witnessed by the eyes of thousands. Their hearts desire and prayer to God for the nations, and all ranks therein, is, that they may be saved. Blood and slaughter, tumults and mutiny, are not the instruments of Reformation: they can defy their keenest opposers.

to point out the faintest traces of these in their history. Some of these have fallen out in their times; and it always was their care not to touch the unclean thing.

I should like to know, in what rebellion, riot, mob, insurrection, or tumult it was, that the select Committee of the Burgher Associate synod found the Old Dissenters engaged directly or indirectly, that they have characterized them so freely by the name Anti-government. The old Dissenters desire to be humbled before God, that they are men of the like sinful passions with others, and that they are liable, through the united force of corruption and temptation, to run into the same excess of riot with all others; but they have reason to bless the name of God, that hitherto, their most inveterate opposers have not found occasion to fix those disorderly practices upon them; and I, one of the most unworthy of their number, do, in their name, put both the Committee, and their grand constituents the Synod, the supreme judicatory of your church, to an absolute defiance, on that particular.—The characters of some in the nations are amiable to them; and to the persons of all of them, from the highest to the lowest, they are free of prejudice; they are well affected. They account it their duty, to exert themselves for the good of their neighbour, and their country; and sincerely regret, that, in many instances, the sinful conditions of Union shut them out from contributing, by their public endeavours, to the good of others, in a more extensive sphere. They view themselves bound by the sacred authority of the moral law to the practice of all relative duties, to their country and to mankind, which leads them to comply with every social regulation, plan, and constitution, adapted to promote the discharge of these duties, when a compliance therewith does not involve the person in sin; though, when a co-operation is established on a compliance with sinful terms, the old Dissenters, regarding the divine precept, *Say ye not a confederacy*, Isa. viii. 12, content themselves in a

peaceable abstraction; and wait for the arrival of better times, when the terms of *righteousness* shall become the avenues leading to a coalescence, and a co-operation with their brethren of mankind.—The judicious public may judge, if persons of these principles and practices do breath out rebellion against magistrates, and enmity and blood against the world, or their own country: But such are the persons whom your Committee have called by the hard and unjust name *Anti-government*.

The Committee begin their attack against the Presbytry, by the Covenants National and Solemn League, with the fourth section of the twenty-third chapter of the Confession of Faith. Gentlemen, I am happy to meet you upon the field of our Covenants and Confessions. As you and I profess to own the propriety of these for subordinate standards, it is superfluous to attempt a proof of their orthodoxy. The controversy betwixt us turns upon the sense in which our pious reformers understood these standards. You alledge, that these Covenants and that Confession, in the sense of the reformers, allow a Christian reformed people, such as the reformed lands of Britain, to acknowledge for God's ordinance any magistrates, whatever religion they may profess, whether it be Heathenish, Mahometan, Jewish, Popish, Prelatic, &c.; and whatever are the terms on which such persons are vested with such power, providing always their instalment is by the voice of the people. That this was their meaning, I refuse; and do maintain it was the general current sentiment of our most eminent reformers, from the first dawn of reformation, to its brightest splendor; was the spirit of all their exertions in favours of a civil reformation; and is the true sense of these Covenants, and that Confession, to acknowledge none as God's ordinance, in such lands, but those who settled upon scriptural constitutions, possess scriptural qualifications, are installed into office in an agreeable manner, and employ their power in defence of the true religion.

I am now to adduce my proof of the truth of this assertion : It shall be taken out of a few quotations from the publications of the reformers, the meaning of which does not admit of controversy.—But, previous to this, shall suggest to you a distinction, which the reformers, and the writers upon their cause, made betwixt *Christian* reformed lands, and *unenlightened* unreformed lands. They allowed that many things might be borne with in the one, which could not be borne with in the other ; and that the reasons which made it plainly unlawful to acknowledge, as God's ordinance, persons professing a false religion, and engaged to support this, as a condition of power, within a reformed land, did not apply with the same force to reject authority in the persons of heathens, in an unenlightened unreformed land : they did not condemn the magistracy of heathenish countries in itself, but permitted the subjects of reformed lands, when travelling through, trading with, or residing within heathenish lands, to submit unto the rulers of the place ; and to comply with their constitutions and laws, in so far as these were not repugnant to any law of God. This distinction of our reformers, if averted unto, will throw light upon, and ascertain the meaning of any passage in the writings and standards of the reformation, the interpretation of which may appear doubtful.—That this is a distinction of our reformers own making, those who are versant in their history cannot fail to perceive.

My first quotation is taken from the Rev. Mr. John Knox, an eminent reforming minister, who lived in the beginning of the reformation in Scotland, whose sentiments were approved by many of his co-temporary reformers, and by the propogators of the same cause after him. The quotation is taken from the contents of his second blast of the trumpet, distributed into four positions ; and pity it is the world was not favoured with his own explanation of these at large !—" 1. It is not birth only, nor propinquity of blood, that maketh a

king lawfully to reign above a people professing Christ Jesus, and his eternal verity; but in his election must the ordinance which God hath established in the election of inferior judges be observed.—2. No manifest idolator, nor notorious transgressor of God's holy precepts, ought to be promoted to any public regimen, honour, or dignity in any realm, province, or city, that have submitted themselves to Jesus Christ, and to his blessed evangel.—3. Neither can oath nor promise bind any such people, to obey and maintain tyrants against God and against his truth known.—4. But, if either rashly they have promoted any manifest wicked person, or yet ignorantly have chosen any such an one, as after declareth himself unworthy of regimen above the people of God, (and such be all idolators and cruel persecutors) most justly may the same men depose and punish him, that unadvisedly before they did nominate, appoint, and elect."

My second quotation is taken from a declaration of the General Assembly of the church of Scotland, concerning the present dangers of religion, and especially the unlawful engagement in war, against the kingdom of England, &c. dated at Edinburgh, the last day of July, P. M. 1648.; wherein, *inter alia*, they say, "the second article," [*viz.* of the Solemn League,] "is violated; because, instead of endeavouring to extirpate Popery and superstition without respect of persons, (as is exprest in the covenant,) there is in the late declaration of the committee of estates, a desire of the Queen's return, without any condition tending to the restraint of her mass, or exercise of Popery: We do also conceive there is a tacit condescending to the toleration of superstition, and the book of common prayer, in his Majesty's family, because it was reserved by himself in his concession, brought home by the commissioners of the kingdom; so these concessions were never plainly declared by the parliament to be unsatisfactory to their Lordships: howbeit, it hath been often and

earnestly desired; neither can we conceive how the clause concerning the extirpation of Prelacy, can consist with endeavouring to bring his Majesty with honour, freedom, and safety, to one of his houses in and about London, without any security had from him, for the abolition of Prelacy; it being his known principle, (and publicly declared by himself, shortly after he went to the isle of Wight) that he held himself obliged in conscience, and by his coronation-oath, to maintain archbishops, bishops, &c.—Can it be said they are endeavouring to extirpate Prelacy, who after such a declaration would put in his Majesty's hand an opportunity to restore it?"

My third quotation is taken from a seasonable and necessary warning and declaration of the same church of Scotland, unto all the members thereof, concerning present and imminent dangers, and concerning duties relative thereto; dated at Edinburgh, 27th July, *A. M.* 1649.; wherein, *inter alia*, they say, "In the League and Covenant which hath been so solemnly sworn and renewed by this kingdom, the duty of defending and preserving the king's Majesty's person and authority, is joined with, and subordinate unto the duty of preserving and defending the true religion, and the liberties of the kingdom: and therefore, his Majesty standing in opposition to the just and necessary public desires concerning religion and liberties, it were a manifest breach of covenant, and a preferring of the King's interest to the interest of Jesus Christ, to bring him to the exercise of his royal power, which he, walking in a contrary way, and being compassed about with malignant counsels, cannot but employ unto the prejudice and ruin of both."

My fourth and last quotation is taken from the testimony of the Rev. Mr. James Renwick, left in the hands of Mr. Robert Hamilton, gentleman, before his entry to the work of the ministry; wherein, *inter alia*, when speaking of Charles II. he says,—"He cut the neck of

our noble constitution of church and state-government, arrogating to himself a blasphemous supremacy in matters ecclesiastic, altogether inconsistent with the kingly office of our blessed Lord Jesus Christ.—By him it is made essential to the crown by the act explanatory of the supremacy, declaring the same to be essential to the crown, to him and his successors, so that he cannot be owned or acknowledged as king, nor any succeeding upon that foundation, be they who they will, without denying of Jesus Christ, and being guilty of lese-majesty against the King of kings, who will not give his glory to another.—None can pretend any distinction, unless they would cheat themselves out of the truth, and become guilty of his blasphemous robbing of the Son of God; for he hath no civil power distinct from his supremacy: that, I say, his supremacy is the foundation of all power he pleads for, and takes all acknowledging of him as an acknowledgment thereof, and why may we not? Seeing it is made essential to the crown.”

These few are all the quotations I judge necessary to adduce at present. To me they appear fully sufficient to ascertain the point in question. I now ask you, upon reading them over, Do you think it to be agreeable to these declarations of our reformers, that persons of every false religion,—the very worst you can suppose, and engaged as a condition of government to support that religion, ought to be acknowledged as lawful rulers in a Christian reformed land, particularly, in the Christian reformed lands of Britain and Ireland? Again, Do you think it to be consistent with these declarations of our reformers to maintain, that our reformers understood the National Covenant of Scotland, the Solemn League of Scotland, England, and Ireland, and the Confession of Faith, in a sense in which they could be bound to Prelatic princes, particularly, to princes circumscribed by the constitution, and engaged by coronation oath, to profess in their own persons, and to support within their dominions that false superstitious

religion of prelacy? The truth is, our reformers thought not so, neither do these covenants and that confession mean so, in the judgment of the reformers themselves, as expressed by the General Assembly above, who must be allowed by all, to be the soundest interpreters of their own standards. Says Mr. Knox, as above, "No manifest idolator, nor notorious transgressor of God's holy precepts ought to be promoted to any public regimen in a realm or province, that have submitted themselves to Jesus Christ: neither can oath bind any such people to obey and maintain tyrants against God and his truth known." That worthy minister does not qualify his doctrine by the limitations of the Secession church, tyrants against men in their natural lives and civil privileges; but tyrants against God and his truth known. This doctrine of Mr. Knox exactly agrees to the doctrine of the Reformed Presbytry; and, upon it as a first principle, drawn from scripture, the whole fabrick of the civil reformation was reared. It is much to the honour of the Scotch nation, that the Father of lights was graciously pleased to discover this principle to our reformers, in the dawn of reformation. Having understood it, the reformers employed their most vigorous efforts, consistent with duty, to erect amongst them a scriptural magistracy. It ought not to be reckoned a small attainment in the progress of civil reformation, that our reformers procured Popery and idolatry to be banished the throne, in the days of James VI. a prince, who, during his reign in Scotland before his accession to the crown of England, appeared to be of a changing sentiment in religion, sometimes favouring Presbytery, and sometimes favouring Prelacy. That the reformers owned and submitted to James VI. is not denied; but several things merit our attention in that case, and in that period. 1. The reformation was then in its infancy; it had not grown up to the same stature it did afterwards. The Secession themselves give a preference to the last reforming period, betwixt the years

1638, and 1650. 2. The different ranks were not so extensively reformed; there existed a numerous body in power who did not embrace the reformation. 3. There was not an article in the terms of investiture, obliging king James to be, in his own person and family, of the Episcopal communion: what profession of Prelacy he made was purely personal, and it was still lamented as a great grievance by the reformers. 4. There was not an article in the conditions of government, obliging him to support the prelatical religion. 5. The oath of allegiance in the National Covenant is well-worded, and properly guarded, and seems to be limited by the king's maintaining the true religion, as contained in the Scotch Confession. The oath of the jurants runs thus, "We promise with our hearts under the same oath, that we shall defend his person and authority, with our goods, bodies, and lives, in the defence of Christ his evangel." In the bond which was subjoined to the National Covenant in the year 1638. the oath runs thus, "We shall, to the uttermost of our power, with our means and lives, stand to the defence of our dread sovereign the king's majesty, his person and authority, in the defence and preservation of the foresaid true religion." 6. The minds of our reformers, at this early period, do not seem to have been fully emancipated from the bondage of the national prejudice, in favours of the doctrine of hereditary right to the crown: Although they had some view of the truth of Mr. Knox' doctrine, that propinquity of blood of itself did not make a king to reign lawfully over a people professing Christ and his gospel; yet the old Scottish idea of hereditary right appears to have been a shackle upon the progress of the civil reformation, till the united force of the enormous immoralities, and intolerable despotism of the lineal descendants of the royal family convinced the friends of the reformation, in later times, to their cost, of the danger and error of such an opinion.

Our primitive reformers, believing the necessity of

scriptural constitutions, and of scriptural qualifications in rulers, and at the same time acting in part under the influence of the idea of hereditary right by birth to the crown, it was impossible but the civil reformation behaved to be retarded, and the reformers themselves reduced to a perplexing dilemma, particularly, when the minds of the lineal descendants run cross to the good cause of the reformation; and if there are any things in their conduct, which do not appear to quadrate so exactly to the great and leading principle in the reformation, the necessity of magistrates possessing scriptural qualifications, and employing the power committed to them by the state, to the protection of the true religion, perhaps, we may, without passing censure upon these great and shining lights, *our reformers*, impute these to an over-zealous attachment to the persons of men, or to the Scottish idea of hereditary right in the reigning family, as the just cause.

All these things considered, I leave with you, Gentlemen, the three following questions to be answered.—

1. Is there any, even the very least room left for Seceders to plead, that their principles, which acknowledge as lawful every magistracy, even those of the most helieth religion, and engaged as a condition of power to maintain that religion, are the same with those of our reformers in the times of James VI. ?—2. Is it consistent with truth to affirm, in the strong language of the Re-exhibition, that allegiance is solemnly sworn in the national covenant to a prelatic prince ?—3. Is there any similarity betwixt the case of James VI. and that of the magistracy, the scriptural right of which is advocated by the Secession, that has receded from our national attainments, is limited by the constitution to be of the prelatical communion, is engaged by coronation-oath to maintain the prelatical religion within the reformed lands, is vested with supremacy over the church, as essentially connected with the civil supremacy over the state, by the deed of constitution, and is now opening

its arms to embrace the man of sin into civil protection? —It does not become us to disparage the civil reformation, in the days of James VI. before his advancement to the English throne; notwithstanding it is no more than just to acknowledge thankfully, that the civil reformation, in the times of Charles I. and Charles II. was advanced a degree beyond that.

In these later times, prelacy was positively declared to be inadmissible to the throne; and the profession of the true religion was declared to be an essential qualification to the filling up of that high and important station. Of the truth of this the Solemn League, in the time of Charles I. and the coronation-oath of Charles II. are sufficient vouchers. On this authority I am warranted to refuse what your Re-exhibition maintains, namely, That our reformers solemnly swore allegiance in the Solemn League to a prelatic prince. That Charles I. was a prelatist by principle, and engaged by oath to maintain prelacy, I frankly grant; but the weight of this, along with other concomitant evils, at last, were felt by the reformers, which issued in making that grand bond of confederacy among the three nations of Scotland, England, and Ireland, called the Solemn League. As it is the incumbent duty, and unalienable privilege of a people to amend their constitutions and laws, and to change them to the better, at all times, according to their improved measures of knowledge, though at no time to the worse; so the framers of that league, at the time of the formation thereof, made a notable change to the better in their constitution. In the bond our reformers swear to extirpate both Popery and Prelacy out of the lands, by all scriptural means; but not rejecting their king, they are still willing to own him in that character, providing he can be persuaded to come over into their views about religion, to renounce prelacy, to withdraw his royal support from that false religion in the nations, to bestow it upon Presbytery, and to profess in his own person the Presbyterian religion. On

this footing they bind themselves to him, but not otherwise. It is strange to affirm, that our reformers meant, by the oath in the Solemn League, to persevere in their acknowledgment of Charles I. on supposition of his remaining Prelatist, and continuing his royal support to Prelacy.

But if, in opposition to this, it should be pled by your Committee, that the oath in the Solemn League was meant by the jurants, as an obligation upon them to Charles I. whether remaining Prelatist, or becoming a convert to Presbytery : I appeal the controversy from the bar of Seceders and Dissenters, unto the General Assembly of the reformed church of Scotland ; a church much more famous than them both. In their determination let us cheerfully acquiesce : and for this we have the most valid reason, as the Assembly certainly understood the definite sense of the oath they had sworn. What their determination is we find in my second and third quotations. In the second quotation the General Assembly are explaining the meaning of the second article of the Solemn League : they say in the following words, " We cannot conceive how the clause concerning the extirpation of Prelacy can consist with bringing his Majesty with honour, freedom, and safety, to one of his houses in and about London, without any security had from him for the abolition of Prelacy."—Such is the judgment of the Assembly concerning the meaning of the Solemn League, and it comes out in full opposition to the Exhibition.

If I understand the import of language, our reformers declare, that Charles I. could be no longer owned, in a consistency with their swearing to the extirpation of Prelacy, than by his laying aside that abjured religion, and by his becoming a professor of the religion sworn to in the bond. Agreeable to this, the Assembly say, in the third quotation, concerning the vesting of Charles II. " The duty of defending and preserving the king's majesty's person and authority, is subordinate

unto the duty of defending and preserving the true religion ;—therefore his Majesty standing in opposition to the just and necessary public desires concerning religion, —it were a manifest breach of covenant, and a preferring of the king's interest to the interest of Jesus Christ, to bring him to the exercise of the regal power.”—Such is the judgment of that great Assembly concerning the limits of the oath of allegiance, in the Solemn League, and the connection, as stated in it, betwixt the obligation laid upon the jurants by the swearing of it, and the true religion professed and maintained by that prince, to whom the oath was sworn. The Assembly declare it to be conditional, and that all obligation upon the subjects to his Majesty, flowing from that oath, entirely depended upon his Majesty's professing and supporting the true religion. In the judgment of this Assembly, as expressed in the above two acts, none could be owned as king, even in civil things, in a consistency with the Solemn League, unless they were of the same religion with the bonders ; and in this they did not exceed the law, as found in the books of Moses, commanding a Christian people to set up over them a brother ; nor the rule presented by the apostle to the Corinthians, to set those who belonged to their own communion to judge amongst them.

There are some who affect to form a doubt, Whether the obligation of the oath of allegiance in the National covenant, was conditioned upon the prince's maintaining the religion sworn to in the covenant ; but, after these declarations of the Assembly, it cannot be called in question, that the oath of allegiance in the Solemn League was so limited. Of the same kind also was the oath in the bond subjoined to the national covenant, because Prelacy was explained to be abjured by that covenant, no less than Popery, in that advanced period of reformation ; therefore, it follows, our reformers, in the last reforming period, did not solemnly swear allegiance, in the National Covenant, and Solemn League,

to a prelatie prince. I may also add, it follows, that it is wrong to alledge, that these covenants "do not bind not to submit to a government which might in providence come to be established, though different from that in the view whereof they were entered into." I know not by what infatuation the Secession plead the moral obligation of the Solemn League, which in the plain meaning of the words, and in the interpretation of the primitive swearers thereof, binds only to a magistracy professing and maintaining the true religion; while they stand up the warm advocates of a magistracy professing and maintaining Prelacy, abjured in that solemn League. Would it not be more consistent-like for them, (with some others,) to give up altogether with the Solemn League, than in a professed adherence thereto, to plead the scriptural right of a magistracy, whose very being is formed upon an overthrow of the religious part of that League; and which, while it retains that nature, will operate against the religion of the League? For my own part, were I to turn Seceder in principle about magistracy, I would disavow the conditioned nature of the oath, and place it to the score of right-hand extremes in the reformers.

Having pointed out the object of the allegiance sworn to in the covenants, my way is prepared to ascertain, and apply the meaning of the fourth section of the twenty-third chapter of the Confession of Faith, mentioned in the Re-exhibition; it runs thus, "Infidelity, or difference in religion, does not make void the magistrate's just and legal authority, nor free the people from their due obedience to him." The use court parasites, in the times of Charles II. and James VII. made of this passage, was to prove, that magistrates in power were always entitled to obedience from the people under them; and that there was no reason possible which could occur, no iniquity however great, committed by them, that would warrant a people to decline obedience to any precepts of magistrates, much less to reject their

authority: hence the passage was tortured to become the abettor of the absurd doctrine of passive obedience and non-resistance: The use you Seceders make of the same passage, is to prove, That no false religion however gross, professed by magistrates, no sinful limitations in the constitution, binding magistrates to profess in their own persons, and to maintain in their own dominions, as a condition of their power, the most diabolical form of religion; that no invasion made upon the royal prerogatives of Jesus Christ, and the spiritual liberties of his church, can render the authority of such magistrates questionable, much less invalidate the same in a reformed land, while they are recognized by a prevailing majority; hence the passage is tortured by you to become the abettor of the anti-scriptural doctrine, that no distinction is to be allowed in the acknowledgment of magistrates betwixt a Heathenish and a Christian people, betwixt a reformed and an unreformed people; betwixt a people emerging out of moral darkness, and an enlightened people bound by solemn oath to their religious establishments; and that no distinction is to be allowed betwixt a *providential*, and a *preceptive* magistracy. Which of those uses of the passage is the most injurious to it, would be hard to determine. Both of them stand condemned by the suffering remnant in the last persecution.

It is easy to ascertain and apply the genuine meaning of the passage, from what has been represented as the sentiments of our reformers, concerning that people whose civil establishments never have been reformed according to scripture, and that people whose civil establishments have undergone a reformation according to scripture. — Our reformers allowed that there was a vast difference betwixt these two sorts of people. Their principles as exhibited in the Solemn League, and their own explanations thereof, as noticed above, led them to own none, in these reformed lands, as magistrates, who were infidels, or of a different religion,

and engaged to support a false religion ; it being a received maxim of the times, that the king and people ought to be of the same true reformed religion : but their principles did not lead them to disown the deed of magistracy amongst Heathens, who had not the written word to guide them, in so far as it was agreeable to the moral law, and where it was a security to the rights of mankind, any more than they were obliged by their principles to disown all other deeds amongst Heathens, in so far as these were agreeable to the moral law. To such a case as this last, the litigated passage in the Confession applies ; and to this interpretation of it every Dissenter can subscribe. The passage is *periodical* and *caseable*. It applies to certain times and situations ; therefore, it must not be extended *generally* to every case and period ; unless we are so foolish as to attempt to state plain contradictions in the opinions held by the reformers. Neither was this passage without its own proper use ; for while it made up a part of the political system held by the reformers, it served as a rule of direction to individual Christians in unenlightened lands, and to their own people sojourning for a time in such lands.

In agreeableness to this, I shall subjoin the remarkable words of Mr. David Hackstoun, gentleman, martyr, when before the privy-council. Being interrogated how he would answer to that article in the Confession, that difference of religion doth not make void the magistrate's right and authority. He replied, " That question was answered long ago by the Solemn League and Covenant, which binds us only to maintain and defend the king in the defence of the true religion." This martyr, who was well seen in the principles of the reformation, had a very different view of that article from the Secession. They apply it indiscriminately to every prince : he understood it with a distinction, betwixt a reformed and an unreformed state.

To refute this application of the passage it will be

quite idle for your Committee to plead, that this explanation is taken not out of the passage itself, but out of a connected view of it with other passages. I might say, this is not the only passage in the Westminster Confession, where the proper sense of it needs to be ascertained from a connected view of the standard writings of the reformers. There are more parts of the same work, the meaning of which cannot be solidly fixed, without calling in the aid of other parts. To specify some of these would be no great task. It may be sufficient to suggest, at present, that that very passage of the second section of the twenty-third chapter, upon which the debate concerning church-fellowship is managed betwixt Seceders and the Relief church, cannot be solidly ascertained, without recourse had to other parts of the standard writings of the reformers, confirmed by their common practice. Would your Synod be so wise as to adopt this method of explanation, I am persuaded, the event would shew, that this were a more effectual method to rescue the Westminster Confession from the patrociny of promiscuous communion, than to deny that the passage speaks of church-fellowship, to the offence of every true friend of the Confession.—To satisfy your minds in the sense I have given of the passage, do but take a view of it in connection with the constitutional laws of the reformation, respecting the instalment of magistrates, and the conduct of the reformers towards Charles I. and Charles II. at his coronation.

The Committee alledge, that “ the conduct of the Reformed Presbytry is contrary to the practice of the martyrs of Jesus Christ in Scotland, who,” you say, “ never refused subjection to Charles II. till the most oppressive methods were used to compel them directly or indirectly to acknowledge his supremacy, not only in the state, which they never denied, but even in the church of God in Scotland.” I am sorry, Gentlemen,

you are either so ignorant of history, or so much disposed to adulterate the truth of history, as this paragraph represents. The covenanters who suffered to the death under Charles, during the first period of the persecution, it is acknowledged, died owning him as king; such as the Rev. Mr. James Guthrie of Stirling, and the noble Marquis of Argyle. But, after that by the act explanatory, the spiritual supremacy was declared to be an inherent right in the crown, the later martyrs generally disowned him in both civil and religious matters; such as, the Rev. Mr. Donald Cargil, and Mr. David Hackstoun of Rathillet. The grounds upon which those martyrs who suffered prior to the act explanatory owned Charles II. were the following.—He was duly constituted *their* king according to the word of God, and covenanted reformation: and although they held their sufferings to be unjust, yet they did not apprehend, that one, or a few acts of male-administration in reigning powers, affecting individuals, invalidated the authority which had been lawfully constituted.—It was still hoped by them, that the prince would see his sin, and be reclaimed.—All their acknowledgment of him was founded upon his constitution; it still remaining the same till altered by the act explanatory. On these grounds, our noble martyrs, who fell a prey to Charles II. in the first period of the persecution, owned the authority under which they suffered.

For what reason you Seceders alledge that the conduct of the Reformed Presbytry is contrary to the practice of these martyrs, I am at a loss to perceive. Is there a parallel betwixt the present situation of the Reformed Presbytry, and that of the martyrs? These were under a magistracy constituted according to the word of God, and the covenants; but you dare not pretend to say, that the Reformed Presbytry are so situated.—You very well know, that the constitution of the present magistracy is contrary to the word of God, and founded upon the ruin of the covenants. The majority

of the sufferers and martyrs, in the later period of the persecution, after the time that the spiritual supremacy was made essential to the crown, rejected Charles in both civil and sacred things. Witness the honest party worsted at Bothwell, who, when enumerating the moral causes of their defeat, give a place to the sin of joining with the Erastian party, that took in the king's interest, as a very principal cause in the sight of a holy God;—the Sanquhar-declaration,—the testimonies of sufferers,—and many who survived the persecution, that lived scattered through the lands, under a testimony against both church and state, as settled at the late Revolution, without any pastor, till the reverend Mr. John M'Millan, minister of the gospel at Balmagie, saw it his duty to withdraw from the establishment, and to connect with them.

I shall present to your view one testimony of the martyrs out of many: It is the joint testimony of three martyrs who suffered at Edinburgh, 11th March 1681. I chuse to fix upon this testimony, because it is directed to the shire of Stirling, within which some of the Committee, and I myself do reside. They are obviating an objection, that it is not a Presbyterian principle to cast off magistrates: and to this they reply, "We grant with you; but where are the magistrates?" They were once placed such, but they cast out themselves, when they brake the covenant, and set up a cursed supremacy over the Lord's heritage; and when they have done that, we think they are no more to be owned as magistrates by Presbyterians; but to be cast off."—These instances, with the brightness of a sun-beam, prove the gross falshood of your assertion, that the saints and martyrs of Jesus never denied the supremacy of Charles II. in the state. Gentlemen, it strikes me with no small surprize, with what confidence you have ventured to issue into the public such falshoods upon the memory of our honoured martyrs, as cannot escape being detected by intelligent readers, and which you

might have been 'assured their friends and successors in the same cause would not suffer to be circulated, without that proper resentment, with which it becomes them to treat the propagation of such injurious falsehoods, as at once tend to blacken the character of faithful witnesses, and to bury precious truth.

The grounds upon which the later martyrs disowned the complex authority of Charles II. both in church and state, were the following :—That royal apostate by this time had exhibited clear evidence of being irreclaimable in his despotism and wicked courses. Mr. Renwick and his followers even thought the sufferers continued too long in acknowledging the lawfulness of his authority. —The constitution was then changed from its original form, in which it stood, when he was admitted king ; spiritual supremacy being declared to be an inherent right in the crown,—there was no possibility in their judgment of owning him in his civil supremacy, without owning him in his spiritual supremacy also ; these two being essentially united together in the constitution, and the law knowing no such distinction in fact, as an owning him in civil things, without owning him in spiritual things, they humbly thought every such distinction to be fanciful, and a mere cheating of the conscience ; they apprehended, according to the genius and spirit of the constitution, he could with no more propriety be called king wanting his spiritual supremacy, than the creature man could be called man wanting his spirit or soul : this is obvious from the testimony of Mr. Renwick, quoted above.—On the whole, it is apparent, that the spiritual supremacy being inlaid into the constitution, in the notion of an essential ingredient, our sufferers justly concluded that this rendered it unsafe for them to own the civil authority, so circumstantiated. With this opinion of the sufferers, the principle of the Reformed Presbytry is perfectly homogeneous. Deny the lawfulness of a patronage clergyman admitted to a parochial charge, upon the footing of a presenta-

tion given and accepted ; and try, if you can, to justify the lawfulness of a civil magistrate, admitted to rule over the people of God, upon the footing of spiritual supremacy over the royal prerogatives of our great Lord and master, Jesus Christ, and the new-testament privileges of his church.

The Committee have shown a vast eagerness to impute something on this article to the members of the Reformed Presbytry, which, I am sure, they never will own with ; and to extort concessions from them, which they would fain construe into an yielding up of the cause. They would attempt to make the writers upon the Presbytry's principles say, that the great, the sovereign, nay, the only reason, why any martyrs declined the acknowledgment of Charles' authority, was the *violence* used to compel them to acknowledge his supremacy, as head of the church ; and that the martyrs were by no means influenced to reject his authority, on account of the spiritual supremacy being made essential to the constitution. The persons upon whom the Committee have made the strange attempt to fix this, are the Rev. Messrs. Fairlie and Thorburn ; writers, who it is well known, have spoke and wrote in pointed and unequivocal terms upon the article ; and who have proven from the martyrs own words, that the chief ground of their rejecting Charles Stewart was his blasphemous supremacy over the headship of Christ, the only head of his church.—One of the above writers has gone so far on this head as to say, (and which certainly is truth) “ If it be true that these venerable martyrs cast off the then authority, only on account of the persecution, oppression, and bloody violence used against them, then they can by no means be said to have suffered what they did suffer *as Christians* ; that is, they cannot be called *martyrs* at all, for a martyr is one that suffers and dies only witnessing for religion ; *i. e.* for Christ's sake, witnessing to the truth of his religion in general, or of the scripture-doctrine of his divine per-

son, or divine offices, and prerogatives in particular, as the only Prophet, Priest, and King of his church."

The strange attempt of the Committee to fix the above charge upon these writers, is made in the following manner. "That the martyrs acknowledged King Charles' his civil supremacy, and never took up arms in self-defence, till methods were used to enforce their acknowledgment of his supremacy, as head of the church, is confessed by Messrs. Fairlie and Thorburn, as quoted by Mr. Thomson, in the second of the tracts above-mentioned, p. 67, 68."—What a pitiful work is it for the Committee to drag these authors, whose writings are extant, recent, and in the hands of many, through the books of another, and to make them speak, as quoted by Mr. Thomson! Had they taken the trouble, which the freedom of commenting upon them in public certainly called upon the Committee to have done, to have looked into the authors, and attentively to have perused their own words, as delivered by themselves, it might have checked this strange and fool-hardy attempt. But what is a common loss of mankind, to be better acquainted with things by report, than by personal knowledge of our own, appears to be the particular loss of the Committee on this occasion. They are better acquainted by far with the writings of Messrs. Fairlie and Thorburn, through Mr. Thomson's report of them, than through any personal knowledge which they themselves have of these books.

The Committee alledge, "That the practice of the Reformed Presbytry, in many cases, is entirely opposite to that of the saints of God, mentioned in scripture, particularly those who lived under the Old-Testament dispensation of grace, who were frequently reduced to more peculiar circumstances, on many occasions, than any Christians ever were, who live in these later days, and yet they never resisted the civil powers, under whose oppression they frequently groaned." Gentlemen, I am truly at a loss to take up the sense of this

general abstract saying: to make it intelligible to me, and, I suppose, to many of your own people, an explanation would be necessary. I do not know what you mean by these words,—“the saints of God mentioned in scripture, particularly these who lived under the Old-Testament dispensation of grace, were frequently reduced to more peculiar circumstances, on many occasions, than any Christians ever were, who live in these later days.”—Please, Gentlemen, let us have the Committee’s explanation of this paragraph. On my own account, I beg it, that I may understand what connection and force it has in our controversy; on account of the world, I beg it, that they may be enabled to form a right judgment of every position advanced upon the argument betwixt us; on the account of your own people, I beg it, that they may not be caught in the snare of implicit faith. A request so reasonable will not surely be denied.

You seem to vindicate the conduct of the late martyrs, in lifting arms against the oppressive measures of Charles II.; but averr concerning the saints of God, mentioned in scripture, particularly those who lived under the Old-testament dispensation of grace, that they were reduced to more peculiar circumstances, on many occasions, than any Christians ever were, who live in these later days, and yet that they never resisted the civil powers under whose oppression they groaned. Strange! A vast, an incomprehensible mystery! The Old-testament saints, though oppressed, and reduced to more peculiar circumstances than any Christians ever were, who live in these later days, only groaned under the oppression of the civil powers; they tamely submitted, and discharged all the duty incumbent upon them, by heaving out the sad groans of distressed nature, under the iron rod of wanton oppressors; they never attempted to deliver themselves by active measures, nor did they, like the sufferers in the reign of Charles II. embody themselves for mutual defence against the rage of causeless tyranny.

But you say, "the sufferers unders Charles II. were obliged by the laws of God and nature, to defend themselves with arms, against the violent stretches of arbitrary power that were exerted upon them."—Having read your account of the old-testament saints groaning under oppression, I expected your commentary upon the lifting of arms by the sufferers would have come out in the style of our *wise* moderns: Ah! unprecedented measure! What open rebellion! What disloyal practice this! How unlike to the imitable example of scripture-saints for a dissenting minority to lift arms! Where will these well-meaning, but ill-informed persons, find a precedent to their conduct, among the saints of God, mentioned in scripture, particularly among these who lived under the old-testament dispensation of grace, who were frequently reduced to more peculiar circumstances, on many occasions, than any Christians ever were, who live in these later days? Defend this conduct of theirs who will, we are not ashamed to abandon it, and rejoice to be the followers of scripture-saints, leaving the patrociny of such antisciptural conduct to the hot-headed anti-government men. Such a commentary it was perfectly natural to expect; but, to our surprize, we are told, these sufferers were obliged, by the laws of God and nature, to defend themselves with arms. No laws of God and nature, it seems, to oblige Bible-saints to defend themselves by arms; these, it seems, discharged the whole duty contained in the laws of God and nature, by groaning under their oppression: but there are laws of God and nature in force, under the tyranny of Charles II. to oblige the sufferers to lift arms. I think he must possess a very extraordinary capacity, who is able to comprehend the mystery of such doctrine. Whatever interpretation you may be pleased to put upon this abstract saying, and however hard it is to be understood, the above plain contradiction to the practice of the sufferers, in our own land, is obvious in it.—As you have huddled up the practice of old-

testament saints under antisciprural magistrates, in a manner so abrupt; it may not be unseasonable to produce a few things concerning the conduct of the Jews about magistrates.

The laws delivered by the Most High to the people of Israel, concerning the qualifications, instalment, and acknowledgment of magistrates, remained invariably the same to each generation of that people. Those laws, which obliged one generation, obliged all generations in similar circumstances; therefore the duty of each generation of that people, concerning the qualifications, instalment, and acknowledgment of magistrates, was invariably the same. But while the laws themselves remained the same, the practice of different generations, in regard of those laws, appears to have been various, if not directly opposite in some instances. That the practice of different generations varied, in regard of ritual duties and temple institutions, is undeniable. One generation held by the purity of those ordinances, another departed from the purity of them. Under such variations about ceremonies and worship, it is hardly supposable that the Jews would never err about God's ordinance of magistracy amongst them, or that their practice about this particular would be uniformly one throughout all generations. Their history tells us, none of these were the case. For, while one generation held by the purity of the laws of magistracy, another grossly departed from it. The deviations into which that people went, at times, were so great, that they are said to have changed the ordinance. And Jehovah himself complains that Israel had cast off the thing that was good; and why? because they had set up kings, but not by him, Hosea viii. 3, 4.

Now, gentlemen, I may propose to you this easy question, Which of these two practices challenges our imitation, whether that which corresponds unto the law, and therefore is legitimate; or, that which departs from the law, and therefore is illegitimate. The pro-

per answer to this easy question will terminate the affair about the practice of the people of the Jews. There are two ways of learning duty, the law of the great God commanding and forbidding; and the clear marks of his approbation, or disapprobation set upon the practices of his church. In making out a reply, you are at full freedom to adopt any of these ways you please.—The instance of king Aza, degrading his mother Maacha from her royal station, because of her idolatry; with the instance of Libnah, a city of the priests, revolting from under the hands of king Jehoram, because he had forsaken the Lord God of his fathers, 1 Kings xv. 13. 2 Kings viii. 22. They seem both of them to be plain and clear examples of denying homage, and refusing subjection to persons in power, on accounts *purely* and *properly* religious. Moreover, they seem to carry obvious marks of divine approbation. Now, if these instances are approved, the inference from them is fairly deducible, that these, and such like, are the only justifiable precedents in similar cases; and that where any practices are found to be repugnant to them, though in the lives of real saints, it becomes posterity rather to throw a veil over them as culpable conduct, than to improve them into imitable examples.

In a foot-note the Committee say, “There is not, perhaps, a moral duty incumbent on Christians, living under the dispensation of the gospel, upon which the Holy Ghost, speaking in the new-testament, is more direct and explicit, than that of subjection to the civil magistrate; see Rom. xiii. 1,—8. Titus iii. 1. 1 Peter ii. 13,—18. To elude the force of those scriptures, which, with all the weight of divine authority, strike at the very vitals of the Anti-government system, on this article; and, if possible, to make them say what the inspired writers never thought, and far less practised, the Reformed Presbytry have tortured them in a very extraordinary manner, with a view to reconcile them to their own professed principles.” Pray, Gentlemen,

How many articles does the Anti-government system contain? Against one of them, you say, the scriptures now mentioned strike. I shall be glad to know the whole number of articles in the system. This footnote confirms what I have observed in the beginning of my letter. The manner in which the Committee have constructed their note, is directly calculated to impress the reader with the opinion, that the Reformed Presbytry deny subjection to civil magistrates to be a moral duty in the days of the gospel. Perhaps, you wisely judged it a service too great to be done to the Presbytry, to inform the reader, that while you and they were agreed about the divine authority of these texts, and about the ordinance of magistracy being taught in them, that you were divided in sentiment about the kind of magistrates, to whom the spirit of God, speaking in these scriptures, inculcates subjection upon Christians. Had you done so, it would have been the truth, and might have prevented your reader from forming a false judgment of the Presbytry's doctrine.

The proper subject of controversy betwixt Seceders and the Reformed Presbytry, lies in the *kind* of magistrates, to whom subjection is enjoined in these scriptures. You Seceders, who deny any distinction betwixt a *providential* and a *preceptive* magistracy, betwixt what constitutes the *lawfulness* of magistracy in a Heathen and a Christian land, maintain, that the Spirit of God by these scriptures binds Christians unto subjection to all magistrates, even in a Christian land, as to God's ordinance, who obtain the ascendancy, whether their personal qualifications, manner of investiture, the conditions of their government, and the exercise of their power, in so far as it relates to religion, be agreeable to God's holy word or not. The Presbytry, who believe in the necessary distinction betwixt a providential and a preceptive magistracy, betwixt the magistracy of a Heathen and a Christian land, maintain, that the Spirit of God by these scriptures binds Christians unto subjection to such ma-

gistrates only, as to God's ordinance, who are agreeable to the law under which they are placed, and answer the general end of the ordinance.—That their explanation is the genuine sense of these scriptures, I now illustrate, by various considerations. And, as I conceive, it will be granted on both sides, that the meaning of all these scriptures is one, to save time, I shall confine myself mostly to the first of them, that in Rom. xiii. 1,—8.

1. There is no hint given in this portion of holy scriptures, of a change having taken place, or to take place, in the days of the gospel, about the ordinance of magistracy, as laid down in the books of Moses, requiring those who reign over the people of God, a commonwealth, nation, kingdom, or empire, owning the religion of Jesus, to be professors of the true religion. When scriptural laws become obsolete, and loose their obligation, it arises from their periodical nature, their unsuitableness to the new condition into which the subjects of these laws are brought, and their unfitness to be of future advantage; therefore, they are commonly exchanged for better ones introduced into their room. Such was the nature of the whole system of ritual institutions commanded upon the Jews: they were imposed upon men until the times of reformation, and gave place to the better system of Christian ordinances. The abrogation of ritual institutions is clearly announced in the new-testament; the reason of their abrogation is owing to that improved and reformed state, into which the gospel-church is advanced by the coming of Christ. Under the reformed and improved state of things in the gospel dispensation, ritual institutions would be of vast detriment to their subjects, without conferring upon them the smallest advantage; therefore, the apostle tells us they were imposed till the times of reformation: they had a beginning, and it is long since they have had an end. But I believe it will be hard for the ablest casuist to show, that God ever revoked an institution, or annulled the obligation of a law, when the duration of

them would tend to the good of his people. Now, as there is no hint given of any change to take place in the old commandment which was from the beginning; and as the professors of the true religion, ruling over a Christian people, are manifestly to the advantage of the interests both of the people and the true religion, I humbly conceive the old law is left in its whole original force; especially, when it is considered, that there are the clearest predictions in scripture, that nations and kingdoms shall be favoured with the word of God, and that they shall take on the Christian character, in the days of the gospel. It cannot be thought, that, in such a case, the apostle Paul sets aside the old law, *Thou shalt in any wise set him king over thee whom the Lord thy God shall choose, a brother, not a stranger*; a professor of the true religion, not a gross corrupter of it. So far is there any thing like to a subversion of, or an opposition against Moses law in this portion, that the account, which Moses and Paul give of the nature and uses of the office, and the qualifications of the persons in office, bears the greatest similarity.

A pestilential sect, under the influence of carnal appetites, sprung up in the early days of the gospel, which denied the ordinance of civil magistracy over Christians, 2 Pet. ii. 10. Jude throughout. This sect, after Corah in the wilderness, vilifying the office itself, strongly pled the liberty of the gospel, as an exemption from all superior authority; and such was their art in pleading the doctrine, joined with the mistaken idea of Christian liberty entertained by many Christians, and the remaining prejudices of the Jewish converts against submitting to civil authority, in the persons of any not of the family of Abraham, that they were likely to blacken the Christian cause, as well as to seduce serious Christians. To guard the church against the infection of this error, and to confute the heretical sect, the apostles frequently taught the perpetuity of the ordinance of magistracy, and the necessity laid upon Christians to subjection in

the Lord.—Further, the apostle in this chapter presents the Christians with a description of the ordinance, in its nature, origin, and ends, and the qualifications of office-bearers, that they, by a just knowledge of the ordinance, might be induced to yield a conscientious subjection, and to revere it as God's moral ordinance, in whatever part of the world they found it erected. But he does not warn them that now in the days of the gospel, it became Christians, living in countries wearing the Christian character, professing their faith in Christ, and obedience to him, to lay aside the *punctilio* of requiring a profession of the true religion, in magistrates ruling over Christian lands, in order to state the lawfulness of their authority; for, by the gospel, religion was made indifferent to the rank and office of magistracy. Instead of this, he gives such a description of the character of the civil magistrate, his relation to God, the duties of his function, and his personal and official qualifications, as shows that this is but attained *in part* in a Heathenish magistracy, and that it is *fully* attained in a well-qualified scriptural magistracy alone.—Hence the interpretation of Seceders cannot be just, for qualifications, duties, &c. mentioned by the apostle, will not accord to, or be found in every kind of magistracy amongst men, although sanctioned with the high authority of the people's choice.

2. The illustrious character and high title bestowed upon the magistracy mentioned in this chapter, are no despicable consideration in favours of the Presbytry's doctrine. The apostle in express terms calls them *the ordinance of God*: speaking of the magistrate in the singular number, he denominates him *the minister of God for good*: and speaking of magistrates in the plural number, he says, *They are God's ministers, attending continually upon this very thing*. These high and illustrious names given to the magistracy, incline me to think, that the apostle is not here discoursing of every kind of magistracy that may happen to prevail in the course of God's

sovereign, deep, and mysterious providence, but of that magistracy *alone* which bears some correspondence to his institution. The minister of God, according to his institution, and the servant of providence are not perhaps the same things.—Some persons have unwarily confounded these two, allowing no distinction betwixt the minister of the law, and the servant of providence, Great oppressors, the violent robbers of nations, high in natural power, have been the hand of God, and the undesigning servants of his providence, in executing deserved strokes upon the guilty: of this sort was Nebuchadnezzar, in God's strange work of judgment upon the Israelites, of which he was the instrument, and on which account he is denominated the servant of God; but in the work he was no more than the undesigning servant of God's holy providence, and was even then acting in immediate opposition to the moral law, as stating his duty towards his neighbour. Zerubbabel is also called by the name of God's servant, but on a very different account; for while he was the servant of providence, in merciful dispensations, to the Jews returned to their own land, he acted in direct conformity to the express precepts of the law, and so was filling up the character of the minister of God according to his law; and in him were united the two characters of the servant of providence, and the civil minister of God, according to his institution for good unto the subject. He was both the servant of providence, and the minister of the law,

The minister of God, in order to answer the end of his office, and to fill his own character, must act in some measure of conformity to the law, in so far as this is revealed to him, whether by nature or grace; and when his administration is found correspondent to the law, he will become the minister of God *for good*, will prove a blessing and not a curse. 'Then the mountains shall bring peace to the people, and the little hills righteousness; then he shall judge the people with

‘righteousness, and the poor with judgment; then he shall save the children of the needy, and break in pieces the oppressor.’ Hence it is obvious, that the apostle discovers what all magistrates ought to be, and what *in fact* those are whom he calls the ordinance of God, to whom obedience and subjection are due for conscience sake. The apostle’s magistracy is a magistracy *for good*. But there is another magistracy, which we are told by Solomon, can be regarded only as a sensible curse and plague: *Wo to thee, O land, when thy king is a child, and thy princes eat in the morning*. Evil and not good to the subject is the effect of such magistracy, and a magistracy too feigning in holy providence; therefore Solomon bewails the wretched state of the people under it, *Wo to thee, O land*.—*Query*, Is the magistracy mentioned by Solomon, the same with that mentioned by the apostle? Are they both the ministers of God *for good*?

3. The amiable qualifications ascribed to those magistrates, to whom the apostle inculcates subjection upon every soul, are incompatible to the character of many, who obtain the actual ascendancy among men. The apostle gives us the qualifications of those persons who can claim subjection, for conscience sake, in the following expressions.—*Rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil*.—*He is the minister of God to thee for good*.—*He is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil*.—*They are God’s ministers attending continually upon this very thing*. And he points out the method by which persons may avoid the wrath of these powers, in the following expressions; *Wilt thou then not be afraid of the power? Do that which is good, and thou shalt have praise of the same*.—*But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he beareth not the sword in vain*. Such amiable qualifications are found in the magistracy spoken of in the xiiith chapter of the Romans. But I do not apprehend that they will apply to the case of all, who have been, or who may be

in the possession of power among men. The annals of nations exhibit the reverse to have been the qualities of some in power, and recognized by the subjects over whom they have reigned.

The prophet Amos sets before us, in his prophecy, the character of the civil magistrates reigning over Israel, at the time when he delivered his prophecy unto that people; and because it may serve as a proper illustration of what I have now asserted, I shall set it before you. Amos iv. 1. *Hear this word, ye kine of Basban, that are in the mountains of Samaria, which oppress the poor, which crush the needy, which say to their masters, Bring, and let us drink.* The magistrates described by the apostle are a terror to evil doers, a praise to them that do well; they are the ministers of God to their subjects for good; but the magistrates of Israel, described by the prophet Amos, were habitual oppressors of the poor and needy, they acted in direct opposition to the subordinate end of the magistratical function, the happiness of the people. Instead of consulting their good, as all the ministers of God do, it was their work to distress, and render the poor subject miserable; therefore the prophet does not honour these magistrates before the people, with the high and illustrious character of the ministers of God, but names them with the goading bulls of Basban; *Hear this word, ye kine of Basban.*—Such were providential rulers over Israel: and who will say that they supported the character of the ministers of God for good, as the foundation of their title to subjection from the people for conscience sake?

For a living instance, perhaps, I might refer to the *Great Mogul*, in whose territory the unhappy creature, called his subject, kisses the chain that binds him, prepared at the awful, though unjust nod of his master, whose will is the supreme law of the country.—*Query*, Does the apostle's character, the minister of God to thee for good, a terror to evil doers, and a praise to them that do well, suit this person in the mode and

general scope of his administration? These who are acquainted with the character of Nero, the highest power amongst the Romans, when the apostle wrote this epistle, need not be told, that it formed a direct contrast to that of the powers described in the xiiith of the Romans. Had his character been good, dubious, or even moderately bad, those who contend he was the higher power meant in the text, would have had a more plausible pretension for their opinion; but the private life, and imperial reign of that person, the former of which being wicked, the later tyrannical to the last degree, leave little room for doubt, that he could not be the person meant by the apostle: if we only farther consider, that these means the apostle points out as the sure method to avoid the wrath of the magistrates, about whom he discourses, were the very things that drew down the wrath of Nero and the Roman powers upon the mild Christians, and procured the apostle's own death. The apostles and disciples of the divine Jesus were employed in doing good, by the constant practice of the numerous duties contained in the moral law, and in the Christian religion, and by testifying against the sins and idolatry of the heathen world, as also by inviting them unto repentance towards God, and faith towards Jesus Christ; but did these good deeds, (and what better good deeds could they perform,) commend them to the protection of Nero? or, did the moral virtue and innocence of their lives exempt them from torture? Instead of this, the great red dragon armed the soldiery to massacre the innocent worshippers of the divine Jesus.

4. The apostle Paul himself draws the character of Nero, in a style opposite to this character of the powers ordained of God, in 2 Tim. iv. 17. under the words, *I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion.* The apostle paints the sanguinary temper and tyrannical reign of Nero, by the expressive metaphor of the voracious lion, a creature whose nature is disposed to shed blood, to

rend and devour the innocent. How is it consistent to apply to the same person the two contradictory characters, a praise to them that do well, and a lion to slay the innocent? Is there a single instance in all the word of God, where God's moral ordinance of magistracy is exhibited under the emblem of these voracious animals; that range the forest, destroying to the ground their defenceless prey, and pointing to the rapacious ravenous quality of the creature? When comparisons of this sort are used, do they not rather hold out a coincidence betwixt the subjects described, and the devouring lion of hell, who goes about seeking his prey? Gentlemen, you may connect this character of Nero, with what the apostle James says of *rich men oppressing the church, and drawing them before their judgment-seats*; and with what the prophet Daniel foretold, chap. vii. 7, 23. *concerning the fourth beast in the vision, with iron teeth, devouring and breaking in pieces, and stamping the residue with its feet, devouring the whole earth, treading it down, and breaking it in pieces*, and try, if you can, to reconcile them to the description of God's moral ordinance in the xliith chapter of the Romans.

5. The apostle Paul rebukes with an uncommon acrimony the Christians at Corinth, for the practice of carrying their mutual civil differences before the Heathen judges of the place. Had these judges been adequate to all the purposes of God's ordinance of magistracy among Christians, it is not likely that the apostle would have represented the Corinthian practice, in the light of *a fault, a crime*, and inveighed so sharply against it, as he does in the vith chapter of first Corinthians. A capital branch of the magistrate's duty lies in deciding differences; and when private means fail to remove these, it is warrantable to apply to the proper judge, (having access to such.) But since the apostle says to the Corinthians, *There is utterly a fault among you, because ye go to law one with another;—brother goeth to law with brother, and that before the unbelievers; before*

the unjust, and not before saints. Is any thing more plain, than that it was sinful in those Christian Corinthians to acknowledge the Heathen civil judges in *their mutual differences*? And if so, how antiscriptural must it be in professing Christians, to plead the lawfulness of a Heathenish magistracy over a Christian people, from the *eleventh* chapter of the Romans! By the apostles doctrine here, such rulers could not be of great use among Christians, for the sacred laws of Christianity shut out Christians, when the dispute lies betwixt *brother and brother*, from the judgment-seats of Heathen judges.—The town-clerk at Ephesus prescribed to the complainers against Paul, the method of a formal law-suit, in order to terminate all differences betwixt the parties; he said, *The law is open, and there are deputies; let them implead one another.* Paul, however, has not freedom to recommend the same measure to the jarring members of the Christian church at Corinth. He exhorts them to adopt the method of arbitration, and to submit the matter in difference to the judgment of their *Christian brethren*, and enforces it upon them from the noble consideration, that the saints, at last, will be admitted to judge angels, and the world. And while he does so, he meets the contending parties with a sharp reproof for their unworthy conduct, *Dare any of you, having a matter against another, go to law before the unjust?*—We are not, with some, to rest the apostle's reason of declining Heathen judges wholly upon one or both of these grounds. 1. That it is an unlawful practice to go to law. 2. That going to law by these Corinthians brought Christianity under contempt by the judges.—The first of these cannot be said, for going to law is no more than applying to the proper judge to settle differences, which cannot be got removed by private means. Neither can the second of these be pled as the *sole* reason, because, it is obvious, that the apostle derives the strength of his objection, from the incompetency of the judges themselves, being *unjust, and unbelievers*, who

therefore could not be considered as proper judges for Christians. The apostle lays a particular emphasis and weight upon the unbelieving state of the judge, says he, —*and that before the unbelievers.*

Although the force of a bloody prosecution, raised against the Christians by their enemies, might compel them to say, as the apostle himself once did, in a certain case, *I appeal to Caesar*, when any hopes are left of an outgate; yet he calls them to consider, that the unjust and unbelieving condition of the judge was sufficient reason to move them to decline his judgment, on differences subsisting betwixt themselves. The odium such prosecutions might occasion upon Christianity, I confess, was, in part eyed by the apostle; but the former is the chiefest ground, upon which he states his objection to the practice. — Now, if the Corinthian practice was objectionable upon the incompetency, the unscripturalness of the judge, with what consistency can this portion in Romans be pleaded, as the foundation of the lawfulness of unbelieving, idolatrous, heretical magistrates, reigning over a Christian people, who profess the Christian religion?

6. The religion of the ever-blessed Jesus condemns, in terms the most clear and peremptory, all instances of injustice, cruelty, and oppression amongst mankind. The uniform language of this holy religion is, *Do violence to no man.* And while it forbids the external acts, to prevent the commission of them, it also strikes against and condemns the latent principle from which they proceed, the malevolence of the heart. It exhibits oppressors under the character of the worst of men, represents them as *visible agents* for Satan on earth, and refers all the plots by which they achieve their wicked purposes to his hellish policy. This religion provides that all the rights of mankind should be kept inviolate. Its golden rule is, *Whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets.* It teaches us, that *the law is not made for*

a righteous man, but for the lawless and disobedient; for the ungodly and for sinners; for unholy and profane; for murderers of fathers and murderers of mothers; for man-slayers, for whoremongers, for them that defile themselves with mankind; for men-stealers, for liars, for perjured persons, &c. In proportion to the spread and influence of the religion of Jesus, will injustice and violence depart from nations; and by its all-conquering energy, will the rights of men and the peace of society at last be promoted. It alone will be the cause of that grand Revolution in the world, when *the wolf shall dwell with the lamb: when the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox.* A religion so abhorrent of injustice, and so amicable to the rights of men, was surely never intended to seal the tyrant's edicts, to give sanction to his title, and to corroborate any system contrived, and employed to the base purpose of oppressing, and rendering one part of mankind the wretched slaves of another, though gilded over with the fair name of government.

Agreeable to these observations we must understand the apostle's doctrine, as preserving the natural and necessary distinction betwixt virtuous and tyrannical powers; betwixt those powers which in the general tenor of administration act for the good of the subject, and those powers which in the general habitual scope of administration rob the subject of his rights, and turn these to their own personal advantage, or improve them to the gratification of the diabolical principles of usurpation, ambition, pride, and cruelty in their corrupted minds. But are not tyrannical powers providential equally so with virtuous powers? And have not such powers frequently existed amongst men? Later generations are imposed upon by the history of former times, if they have not. When, therefore, the apostle says, *There is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God:* he certainly means, either the office of magistracy in all its different branches in the abstract,

or else the office filled with virtuous rulers *only*.—Virtuous powers are of God;—they are his ordinance: *I said ye are God's*.—They are agreeable to the moral perfections of goodness, truth, and justice, in the Deity.—They are ordained of God;—they are appointed by the great Law-giver, in his law and word;—they are qualified with natural and moral endowments in a competent measure, for their office. The wisdom of God speaks of such powers in Prov. viii. 15, 16. *By me kings reign, and princes decree justice. By me princes rule, and nobles, even all the judges of the earth.* These kings and princes, these nobles and judges of the earth, whom God acknowledges for his own, are evidently virtuous powers; for it is said, they *decree justice*. Justice is their great aim, and it predominates in the general tenor of their administration. Just so, the powers said to be ordained of God, are interpreted and explained by the apostle to be virtuous powers; for adds he, *They are not a terror to good works, but to the evil.* They are not like the *unjust Judge*, that neither fears God, nor regards man; who may step aside from his ordinary road, and avenge a poor widow, purely to be delivered from the trouble of her importunity, while neither his inclination nor general tenor of administration are directed to the good of the subject: but the tract they pursue is the beaten path of justice.

From this I would infer, that neither providence, nor the actual possession of dominion *alone*; are the sure standard by which we can resolve the important question, relative to reigning powers, whether they are the moral ordinance of God or not. Their characteristic qualities must be examined. Our Saviour furnishes us with a common standard or criterion, which, with great safety, may be applied to rulers: *Ye shall know them by their fruits*. Is it not then pretty obvious, that the doctrine of the Secession, by an immoderate stretch of the apostles words, *The powers that be are ordained of*

God, tends to destroy the necessary distinction to be observed betwixt tyrannical and virtuous powers? Is it not also obvious, that the Presbytry's doctrine, which makes the conformity or disconformity of the reigning powers to the law and word of God, and not providence and the actual possession of dominion *alone*, the proper standard of determining anent their claim of being the moral ordinance of God, is consonant both to the religion of the gospel, and the scope of this passage in the xiiiith chapter of the Romans? The sum of the whole is this, namely, that something besides providence must be taken into their consideration, in fixing what rulers have, and what rulers have not a divine claim of subjection from the people, for conscience sake.

7. The introduction of the gospel into a nation enlarges the objects of the magistratical duty. It adds the civil preservation of the true Christian religion, as an appendage to the office of magistracy, in every country, which it hath gained over into its interest, and the profession of Christ. This maxim, clearly founded in scripture, was held by our reformers in all the different periods of the reformation, and was entered by them accordingly in their confessions of faith, under the notion of one great article of their creed. The civil preservation of the true Christian religion within the state, they believed to be the duty of the magistrate *as such*, and not of the person of the magistrate *as a man merely*, which is common to him with every other man. It was their received opinion, that the preservation of the true Christian religion belonged unto the office itself in every Christian country; and that magistrates, in virtue of their office, were bound in duty to employ the powers of their office, in behalf of the gospel, against all the open and violent opposers thereof, whom, in the dialect of their own times, they called by the well-known name and distinction of malignants. This doctrine makes a part of both the Scots and Westminster confession.—In the Scots confession, under article 24. our

Reformers express themselves thus: " Moreover, to kings, princes, rulers, and magistrates, we affirm, that chiefly, and most principally, the conservation and purgation of the religion appertain; so that not only they are appointed for civil policy, but also for maintainance of the true religion, and for suppressing of idolatry and superstitions whatsoever: as in David, Jehosaphat, Hezekiah, Josias, and others highly commended for their zeal in that case, may be espied."—In the Westminster confession, under chap. 23. our Reformers express themselves thus: " The civil magistrate—hath authority, and it is his duty, to take order, that unity and peace be preserved in the church; that the truth of God be kept pure and entire; that all blasphemies and heresies be suppressed; all corruptions and abuses in worship and discipline prevented, or reformed; and all the ordinances of God settled, administered, and observed."

That the civil defence and preservation of the true Christian religion, within own his country, belongs to the civil magistrate, is agreeable to the dictates of sound reason. When the Christian religion hath spread through any nation, and become the received religion of that nation, it certainly ought to be considered as the peculiar gift of God, by his grace and providence, to the nation; and by this it becomes the property, the most precious property of the nation, which it is their duty to preserve inviolate, and to defend against all the hostile attacks made upon it by all avowed and plotting enemies, who are at war with the commandments of God and testimony of Jesus, not only because the Christian religion is a religion divine in its origin as proceeding from God, but because it is *their own* property and possession, being conveyed to them by God in the channel of his word and holy providence, which gives unto the people, as a nation, a national right to the enjoyment of the Christian religion, which they are bound to maintain, and of which no power on earth may deprive

them. The genius of the Christian religion, indeed, will not permit the Christian to propagate its spread by coercive measures; but it well allows him, nay, makes it his indispensable duty to repel force directed against it by force. Under whatever form the enemies of Christianity direct their opposition against it, and by whatever means they make their attack; whether by word, write, or arms; under the same form, and by the same means, as of word, write, and arms, are the friends of Christianity called to stand forth in its defence. But where is the power of defending Christianity, and preserving it inviolate, within the nation, against the attacks of violence to be lodged? Is it to be suffered to remain with the people separately, and to lie scattered through the different individuals of the state at large? Or, like the power of defending civil property, is it to be collected, devolved upon, and committed into the hands of the magistrates of the state, and exercised by them? The answer of reason to these questions is, That the twofold power, that of defending civil property, and that of defending Christianity, ought to be lodged with the same persons, and committed into the hands of the magistrates of the state; and that, therefore, the magistrates of a Christian people ought to be such as will answer to the object of this important power lodged in their hands, and approve themselves worthy of the weighty trust, upon which, in a great measure under God, the external safety and peace of Christianity within the state depends.

The object of the civil magistrate thus enlarged, it becomes his manifest and indispensable duty to act extensively as a terror to all evil works, to all that oppose themselves violently to morality and Christianity, and as a praise to all good works, to all the true friends of morality and Christianity. In virtue of this he becomes manifestly a keeper of both tables of the law, a supporter and defender of the true Christian religion, as well as of morality, which raises him to the most glorious part

of his character, *a nursing father* to the true church of God and Christ. This may discover to us in what manner kings and judges of the earth are commanded to *kiss the Son*, and to *serve the Lord with fear*, Psal. ii. 3, and how they ought to honour and obey him, who *hath on his vesture and on his thigh a name written, KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS*. It is their duty to acknowledge him as Lord over all, and to employ the powers of their office in behalf of his interest, cause, and church, within their jurisdiction: It is their duty to take the true church of Christ under a *distinguished* protection; and by so doing those magistrates palpably declare that their power is devoted to the service of the Messiah, in opposition to those that give their power unto the beast, by extending a *distinguished* protection to his worship and worshippers.—If the magistracy of a Christian people shall cease to be a terror to evil, and a praise to good works; *i. e.* shall cease to be a distinguished terror to gross heresy, blasphemy, superstition, and idolatry, to the avowed enemies and profane corrupters of Christianity, and a distinguished encouragement to sound doctrine, and pure ordinances, to the true church of Christ; if they shall level all that distinction which their station calls them to preserve betwixt good works and evil works, betwixt truth, piety, and faithfulness, and heresy, superstition, and idolatry, betwixt the sound and the unsound professor of religion; or, if they shall reverse that distinction which their station calls them to preserve betwixt good works, and evil works, and shall become a distinguished terror to truth, piety, and faithfulness, to the sound professor of Christianity, and a distinguished encouragement to heresy, superstition, and idolatry, to the unsound professor of Christianity; can it be said that such magistrates answer to the enlarged object of the magistratical duty amongst Christians, the civil support and preservation of the religion of the gospel? Can it be said that they are lawful scriptural magistrates over a Christian people,

bound to maintain the true religion? Can it be said that they agree to the character which the apostle gives of magistrates in the xiiith chapter of the epistle to the Romans, *a terror not to good works, but to the evil; the minister of God to thee for good?*

The apostle does not present us with a minute and full detail of the various kinds of good and evil works, which are the object of the magistratical duty; he leaves us to find out those by an accurate perusal of the laws of Jehovah, from which human actions take their specific denominations of good and evil, as well as the ways in which magistrates are to act as a praise to good, and a terror to evil works. But it is abundantly obvious, that we must understand both, with reference to the laws given, and the means of information bestowed by God upon a people, as fixing the extent, and defining the objects contained within these good and evil works. According to this observation, we will find that a vast difference ought to be made betwixt the magistrates of a Christian, and those of a Heathenish country. Christian magistrates are under a more extensive law, and they are furnished with better means of information; they are under the obligation of Christianity in their exalted station, and they enjoy the law of supernatural revelation for their sure guide: But Heathen magistrates do not enjoy the same means, nor can it be said they ly under the same obligations. The apostle leads us into this distinction, when he affirms, *That as many as have sinned without law shall also perish without law: and as many as have sinned in the law shall be judged by the law;* and that the *Gentiles not having the law, are a law unto themselves.* The good and evil works, therefore, that ly before the magistrates of a Christian people, and that are the objects of their magistratical duty, are those which are declared to be such by the law of Christianity, as well as by the law of morality; and the good and evil works that ly more immediately before the magistrates of a Heathen people, and that are more

immediately the objects of their magistratical notice; and those which are declared to be such by the moral law. Hence it becomes the immediate, necessary, and indispensable duty of Christian magistrates, in their exalted station, to act with regard to the laws of Christianity, as well as those of morality; on which account, more is incumbent upon, and consequently more is expected from the magistracy of a Christian country, than from the magistracy of a Heathen country. In this sense I apprehend we are to understand the apostle's doctrine. That magistracy which may answer its object in part in a Heathen country, is vastly inadequate to the proper and extensive object of the magistratical duty within a Christian reformed nation, professing their faith in Christ and obedience to him. You may, with the same propriety, maintain, that the wearing apparel of a child of four years old, is fit for the body of a full grown person at the age of thirty, as that the magistracy of a Heathen country is equal to the use and ends of magistracy amongst Christians. Politicians and moralists can, with great fluency, point out the different kinds of government, which are the most proper for nations, according to the respective improvements which they may have reached in civilization, literature, virtue, and an acquaintance with the rights of mankind: I presume, Christians have as good authority to be equally peremptory, in regard to the scriptural qualifications which magistrates, ruling a Christian people, reformed, or if you will, improved from barbarity to civilization; from Heathenism to Christianity, ought to possess, in order to constitute them adequate rulers, or equal to *their* task.

Now, as it will for ever remain an uncontroverted truth, that all the ordinances of God are perfectly complete, and fully adapted to accomplish all the wise and good purposes for which they are appointed by him, whatever defects may attend those persons who are employed in the administration of them, and as the magistracy of a Heathen country is insufficient to the ex-

tensive purposes of magistracy amongst Christians; to suppose that the apostle overlooks the distinction of a Heathen and a Christian people, and that he ties down the consciences of an improved, reformed, Christian people, who are free subjects in their own land, to a Heathen magistracy amongst them, as God's ordinance to them, must include the disagreeable consequence, namely, that the ordinance of Jehovah is lame, wanting, and inadequate.—Far be it from us once to imagine that such doctrine is contained in the directions, instructions, and precepts delivered by the twelve apostles of the Lamb.

On the whole, I therefore humbly conclude, that the interpretation given by the Presbytry of the xliiith chapter of the Romans, is more consistent with the scope of the passage, and the analogy of scripture, than the explanation put upon it by the Secession, who make it the foundation of the scriptural lawfulness of every magistracy among Christians, that may happen to gain the approbation of an apostate majority.

As to the practice of the apostles and the primitive Christian churches, who were scattered through the Heathen nations, I think there is no reason to doubt, that they conducted themselves peaceably, enjoying every privilege, not dependent upon a sinful condition, that the different places in which they lived afforded to them; complying with every good custom not opposite to their duty; submitting to every virtuous regulation conducive to the interests of society; exerting their influence to promote the happiness of mankind; doing good to all, but especially to them that were of the household of faith; regarding the rulers of the several places as the magistrates of a Heathen people, distinguishing betwixt the virtuous and tyrannical, and conducting themselves accordingly; praying for their conversion to the faith of the gospel, and labouring in the duties of their various ranks for the salvation of the people, and to bring the nations forward to the state of

a Christian people, when it would become in a particular manner their *immediate* duty to form their magistracy upon the scriptural Christian plan; sooner than which it is not supposeable that the nations either would or could reform their magistracy according to scriptural Christian laws. Had the apostles outlived the Heathenism of the countries through which they travelled, and seen them take on the Christian name, publicly profess their faith in Christ and obedience to him, I make no doubt, that they would have appeared with more zeal, in endeavouring to reform the civil constitutions and magistracy, after the Christian scriptural pattern, than ever a Knox, a Melvil, and a Douglas did in these lands. And had the Christianized nations, after the use of all due means, refused to become reformed in the great ordinance of magistracy after the Christian pattern: or, supposing them to have been once reformed, and to relapse into defection, and to be irreclaimably obstinate in their apostacy, I make as little doubt, that the apostles would have appeared with a testimony against the apostacy of the nations more pointed, than ever the Reformed Presbytry did, or were capable of doing against the united apostacy of the covenanted lands of Scotland, England, and Ireland.

The Committee have said, "The practice of those who adhere to the Reformed Presbytry, is, in some cases, a direct contradiction of their avowed principles; as is evident from their paying regularly, in common with other subjects, the several taxations imposed by the present government, and their joining in processes carried before the civil courts.—But it will be said, the Anti-government people do not pay cess, and other taxes. Perhaps they do not, in their own persons: but if they see another to do it for them it makes no great odds. Is not this a piece of vile juggling?—But if any belonging to the Anti-government societies, and in full communion with them shall employ another, for

fee or reward, annually to pay for them the land-tax, or other assessments laid on the subject, by the British parliament, does not this rather look like tampering with conscience, than acting agreeably to the dictates of it?" Gentlemen, perhaps your very intimate acquaintance with good oratory taught you to part with your reader, on this subject, by leaving with him something great and impressive: But in the judgment of sound intellectuals it turns out a childish puerility, like the most of your observations in the alterations of your Testimony, and in the other foot notes. I confess there are some things worthy of notice in the old parts of your Book, drawn up by the first ministers of the Secession. Had some of these men been alive, I am afraid, the alterations in your Testimony would have been regarded by them as gross vitiations, and the foot-notes as a real blemish. But why need I hint this, to tarnish the character of those men, who possess abilities sufficient to correct, and polish the testimonies of their old fathers. What connection, I pray you, have the practices of individuals with the soundness and unsoundness of principles? Suppose the practice of every Dissenter were opposite to his principles, does that overthrow the goodness of his cause? The goodness or badness of a principle is totally disconnected from the practice of the professor. Are there not some actions when clothed with certain circumstances lawful, which, when stripped of those circumstances, are justly held offensive? Is there not a wide difference betwixt the failures of infirmity, and allowed deeds? Are there no external actions, the moral good and moral evil; or, the criminality and non-criminality of which, is to be estimated from the state of compulsion and free agency wherein the actor is found placed.—Were I to say nothing more upon this branch, you could not complain that your note was left unanswered.

The Committee reckon law-processes, and the payment of taxations, contradictory to the principles of

Dissenters. This is of a piece with what many of your people foolishly say, that "Dissenters are not able to walk up to their principles, and therefore they must be wrong." Is there any Christian upon earth able to walk up to his principles? *There is not a just man upon earth, that doeth good and sinneth not.* Is there any branch of the moral law, any branch of gospel institutions, or any branch of your Testimony, upon which Seceders can say their practice has been invariably upright? Dissenters have existed many scores of years professing Christian principles, and maintaining a Testimony, in a detached state from the nations; and they must have been more than human imperfect creatures, had not failings in Christian practices, and in a Testimony appeared amongst them.

Before your Committee had proceeded to hold up to the world, what they reckon an inconsistency in Dissenters, the payment of taxations, and law-processes; might it not have been a good preparatory to the doing of that, for Seceders to have pulled the beam out of their own eyes? Seceders have withdrawn themselves from the communion of the church of Scotland, and denied the authority of her ministers over them; but is it not a fact, that they pay tithes to the ministers of the church of Scotland, in common with the people of Scotland? Seceders have denied the authority of the bishops of England and Ireland over them; but is it not a fact, that they pay tithes to the bishops, in common with the people of England and Ireland? Seceders denied the right of the Pretender to the British throne; but is it not a fact, that some of them furnished him, in his late attempt to mount the throne, with men, horses, and waggons, to transport his baggage, and with food to support his soldiery? First cast out these beams out of your own eyes, and then shall you see clearly to cast out the mote out of your Brethren's eyes.

But speaking in serious language, I do not think that enlightened minds, and tender consciences, can take *great pleasure* in having processes before courts, constituted in the name, and sitting under the authority of an Erastian head, and composed of judges qualified to Prelacy; or in paying taxations unto a government, robbing the Redeemer of his royal prerogatives, the church of her spiritual privileges, and strengthening the interest of Roman antichrist. If Seceders and Dissenters are able to get over these scruples, then may we fear that the martyrs of the last age will rise up in the judgment, and condemn us.—It is refused in the strongest terms, that Dissenters see others annually to pay for them the cess, or other taxes. From my infancy I have been bred up amongst Dissenters, and to this day have continued within that body of professors, and I ingeniously declare, that such an instance never has come within the circle of my personal knowledge. I have consulted those of longer standing amongst Dissenters than myself, upon the subject; their answer was they never knew an instance of the like. I should be glad to hear the authority upon which your assertion is rested: especially, as I am well informed, a member of Committee, not far off, has propogated the story with an air of triumph, has told it as the most undisputed fact, and expatiated upon it, as if it alone were sufficient to invalidate the dissenting cause.—But making the supposition, that the Committee were able to produce an instance of a person, employing another for fee, annually to pay for him the cess, and other taxations: What, Gentlemen, is the conclusion you mean to draw from it; or what is the improvement you intend to make of it? I suppose you are all acquainted with many instances of practical immoralities within the Secession; but what argument can an adversary make out of these against the Seceding cause in itself? Or will the laws of charity permit Dissenters to fill up their Testimony, with a recital of such facts, and disseminate them through all

parts, whither their Testimony may find its way? Dissenters are bound to mourn, that sin takes place in any church: but they by no means judge themselves at liberty, to become propagators of the frailties and infirmities of their brethren. You may be fully assured they do not envy the Committee in that particular.

Perhaps, an evasion might be studied by the Committee, in the mode of constructing their sentence, by their *ifs*. Say the Committee, "If they see another to do it for them:—if any belonging to the Antigovernment societies shall employ another, for fee or reward, annually to pay for them." Such a mode of attacking Christians, and preferring charges, is patronized by no honest court upon earth; much less supported by sacred scriptures. It has much the appearance of an artful device, formed by daring slander, in its attacks against the innocent, to afford a subterfuge unto its guilty head, when repulsed by the armour of truth. No positive direct charge is brought by the Committee against the old Dissenters, while yet the strongest insinuations are couched, and almost the same impressions are made upon the vulgar mind, as when the charge is stated in direct terms.—The Committee refer the reader to Mr. Boston's sermon on schism, the Associate Presbytry's answer to Mr Nairn's reasons of dissent, and Mr Thomson's two publications, as a full proof of their doctrine.—It might not be an improper work for a leisure hour, to trace Mr. Boston's thoughts in his sermon, and to show wherein that great man erred: Meantime, I observe, his sermon condemns the scheme of the Secession as much as the Presbytry. Mr. Thomson's first publication received an answer from Mr. Thorburn at Pentland: his second publication scarce merits an answer, being little else than a second edition of his first. The Associate Presbytry's answer to Mr. Nairn has been fully confuted by the Reformed Presbetry, in their judicial Testimony; to the perusal of which, I can heartily concur with the Committee's desire.

Gentlemen, having gone through all your animadversions upon the Reformed Presbetry, as found in your Appendix, I take my present leave of you ; sincerely wishing that an interest in our gracious Mediator Jesus, all necessary comforts in life, an unstinged death, and a glorious immortality, may be the sure portion of us all. I am,

Reverend Gentlemen,

In the bowels of our Lord Jesus Christ,

Your cordial Friend,

At STIRLING, }
May 2d, 1780. }

JOHN M'MILLAN.

P. S. If the Committee shall think proper to offer a reply to this Letter, I shall take the liberty to suggest unto them a good preparatory to the doing of it ; and which, if properly executed, I am sure, will facilitate a reply. It is in short this : That they would write out, and publish a judicious, scriptural, well-supported answer to Mr. Brown's Letter against the toleration of idolatry, blasphemy, &c. ; and that then they would deal with the Synod, to inflict upon that reverend Father, the censure due to one of their own number, for having vented in print, what the Committee call, when found in the books of the Presbetry, *Antiscriptural, Antigovernment*.

